



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS
STUDENTS AMENDMENT (RE-
REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS
AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009**

Consideration of Senate Message

SPEECH

Thursday, 11 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 11 February 2010
Page 1143
Questioner
Speaker Gillard, Julia, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.57 am)—I move:

That amendments (2) and (3) be disagreed to.

These amendments are about inserting into the act the concept that, beyond the current fee refund guarantee that international students have as a result of our consumer protection framework, international students should also be able to get consequential costs. There is no definition of ‘consequential costs’, but obviously they could include the cost of travelling to Australia, the cost of accommodation and food, education agent expenses, travel and medical insurance costs, airport taxes, the cost of immunisations, domestic travel costs, the costs of books and computers, and other education expenses. There is no definition, so consequently there is no way of costing the financial impost of these amendments.

Consequently, the government opposes these amendments on two grounds. Firstly, they are premature because the underlying consumer protection framework for international students is the subject of a review by Mr Bruce Baird, who of course is known to the House as a former Liberal member of this parliament. We created the Baird review in advance of time. Such a review was recommended by the Bradley review of higher education and we decided to expedite it. We put it into the hands of Mr Bruce Baird because we have confidence in him to deal with this issue and we also believe that he can command the confidence of both sides of the House.

So, firstly, this is premature. We first need to get the work from the Baird review. Secondly, on fiscal grounds these amendments cannot be agreed to. They are not costed. They would put an unknowable burden on Australian taxpayers in circumstances where Australian students who go overseas to study do not get the benefits of the kind of consumer protection we already have—let alone a consumer protection framework like that extended by these amendments. I simply do not believe that it is appropriate to put on the shoulders of Australian taxpayers the costs flowing from these amendments when they are unknowable.

From time to time in this parliament we hear questions raised by the shadow Treasurer, in particular, about debt, deficit and unfunded promises. In fact, we heard that as recently as yesterday. The simple truth about these amendments is they are not costed and they are not funded. If they were agreed to, there are only so many ways in which they could be funded. The opposition would have to identify which taxes it believed should be increased to fund these amendments, it would have to identify which other government expenditures it believed should be cut back to free money up to support these amendments, or it would have to acknowledge that by its conduct it is increasing debt and deficit. Those things are not prudent fiscal approaches and they will not be agreed to by this government.

On the question of a timely response in international education, can I say to the member for Sturt: it becomes a bit difficult for the opposition to complain about delay and to then cause delay. These amendments were moved in the Senate by Senator Xenophon. I would have thought the prudent course for the opposition—given that the amendments were new, uncostered and unfunded—would have been to not support the amendments. We are obviously now asking the Senate to not support uncostered, unfunded amendments, putting additional burdens on the shoulders of hardworking Australian taxpayers and, of course, prejudging the Baird review, which is going to provide the government and, indeed, the parliament with further detailed advice about what, if any, additional steps need to be taken in our consumer protection framework.