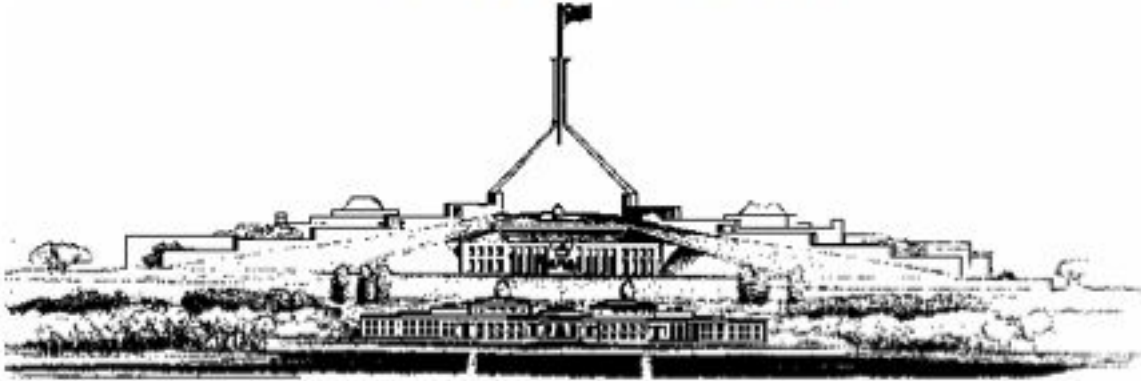




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

McMillan Electorate: Paid Maternity Leave

SPEECH

Thursday, 25 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 25 February 2010
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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.49 am)—This week I was with the children of St James School at Nar Nar Goon, in my electorate of McMillan. They reminded me of why I am here. Children are our today, our tomorrow and our future hopes and dreams in human form. Their future and the future of our country are inextricably linked to how well our generation supports families as they prepare their children for the challenges ahead. The level of support the community provides must reflect the value that society places on its children and the role of parents in the development and upbringing of those children.

Sadly, Australia lags behind the rest of the developed world in the support it provides parents in the crucial months after the birth of a child. Of the 25 countries listed in an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development chart, Australia spends the third-lowest amount on maternity and parental leave payments per child born. Only around half of employed mothers and a somewhat smaller share of fathers are currently eligible for paid parental leave as part of arrangements privately negotiated with employers. As is often the case, we also find that access to employer provided paid maternity leave is inequitable. The level of access is highest for those women earning \$1,000 a week or more and all but disappears for those earning less than \$200. The Productivity Commission in its report on paid parental leave said:

There is compelling evidence of health and welfare benefits for mothers and babies from a period of postnatal absence from work ...

It acknowledges:

There are also reasonable grounds to expect benefits from longer periods of exclusive parental care up to nine to 12 months.

This should be flexible and tuned to the requirements of the parents. There is also compelling evidence from industry of the benefits to the economy to be had from the provision of paid parental leave. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency found in a survey that the number of women who returned to work after childbirth increased dramatically where they had access to parental leave. The agency cites the experience of the ANZ bank. It increased its paid parental leave provision from six weeks to 12 weeks for the primary caregiver and between 2004 and 2005 reported a decrease in turnover rates and an increase in the percentage of female employees returning from parental leave—89.9 per cent in 2006—and an increase in the recruitment of female graduates.

Finally, I would like to read an email from a constituent, Dr Marjorie Linton, of Foster, urging support for paid parental leave. She wrote:

I have relatives in Norway who receive 12 months paid leave.

One of my young friends there was able to spread the leave out, so that mother took 12 months at reduced pay, and the father took 9 months the following year.

What a great thing for parents and their baby.

Surely Australia can afford this, especially as such a scheme would be of great benefit to our children, who after all will be adults soon. I am sure this will make for a healthy nation—in mind, body and soul.