



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (INCOME
SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS) BILL 2009 [NO. 2]**

Consideration of Senate Message

SPEECH

Wednesday, 17 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Wednesday, 17 March 2010
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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) (1.48 pm)—I move:

That the requested amendments be made.

This is the return to this House of the student income support legislation. We are now in a position to secure passage of this piece of legislation today, which is good news. It is good news for university students and their families who have been waiting anxiously for the outcome of this bill. It is good news for the 150,000 students who will now receive student start-up scholarships. It is good news for the 100,000 students who will receive youth allowance for the first time or more youth allowance. It is good news for students in country Australia because the old system of student income support was one in which the participation rate of country kids was going down.

I would like to thank those who have played a constructive role in ensuring passage of this bill. First, I would like to thank members of the government backbench who have worked with me, reflecting the views of their community to me about the contents of this bill. I would like to thank the three Independents in the House of Representatives. Each of them represents a rural constituency and each of them worked with the government to secure passage of this bill because they understand what is good for country students. I would like to thank the Greens and Senator Nick Xenophon. At all stages, they have been honest and straightforward in their dealings with the government. They have been clear on their objectives. They have been prepared to work with us constructively.

Had the opposition taken a comparable approach then passage of this bill could have been secured at the end of last year, avoiding these many months of uncertainty and delay. However, finally, in the last sitting fortnight before we adjourn prior to the budget session, the opposition have managed to do something constructive. I thank the shadow minister for abandoning the opposition's absurd amendments, where they sought to spend an extra billion dollars on student income support—a billion dollars they never saw fit to expend on student income support over 12 long years in government. I thank the shadow minister for abandoning a proposition which would have meant that a student from the home of a multimillion dollar family could have accessed full youth allowance if they had chosen to move from Melbourne to Brisbane to study. This was the original proposition of the opposition, costing more than a billion dollars.

Finally, after all of these months of delay, that proposition has been abandoned in favour of the following very limited proposition which cost something less than \$100 million. This limited proposition is that students who come from the outer regional Australia, remote Australia or very remote Australia classifications under the Australian Standard Geographical Classification index and whose parents' income is less than \$150,000 per annum will be able to access the old independence test criteria. This is a proposition for change that applies to around 1,900 students around the country.

Delay is bad enough but, despite the opposition having entered into an arrangement with the government to deliver this bill, today we have seen unnecessary continued politicking from the opposition, who have always been more concerned about the politics of this than the outcome for students. Despite having entered an arrangement with the government that this new change would apply to students in outer regional Australia, remote Australia or very remote Australia, today the opposition have gone through the farce of moving amendments in the Senate they up-front said they would never insist on to play politics with other country areas. This is a disgraceful thing to do.

The final disgraceful thing done by the opposition is that they have now campaigned up and down the length and breadth of the country promising an extra billion dollars for student income support but, as the shadow minister has made clear, in government they have no intention of delivering it. Their only promise to Australian students is a review. It would have been better for the opposition to have taken a straightforward approach

(Extension of time granted) and this could have been achieved last year. I will conclude in one minute's time and then I understand the shadow minister will take equal time and we will be able to dispose of this matter before question time.

Mr Truss—No, I want to speak on it too.

Ms GILLARD—Well, we will not dispose of it before question time and we can have an extensive debate if you like.

I conclude with the following. I say to the students of places like Shepparton, places where the opposition went and campaigned, understand this: the proposition agreed to by the opposition does not change youth allowance arrangements for you. The amendments being moved by the opposition today that apply to places like Shepparton are amendments that they up-front said to the government today that they would not insist on—that is, they are a pure piece of political theatre. And the opposition are not saying to those students in places like Shepparton that if they are elected as the government they will provide youth allowance under the old independence criteria to those students. They are providing them with a review.

Argy-bargy between politicians is one thing, but this is cruel expectation-raising around the country, only to then abandon those students, to move theatrical amendments they know that they are not going to insist on, to abandon them now and to abandon them as a matter of substance, because the opposition will not go to the next election promising those students extra money. This has been a cruel exercise in delay and ultimately it is a cruel exercise in substance from the opposition because they have raised the expectation of those students and their families. The opposition will do nothing today and, if they are ever elected as government, they will do nothing then to actually assist those students. I am not sure that the National Party leader actually understands this, but that is precisely what his shadow minister has agreed to. With those words I say: let us get this done and get some money into the hands of students, which is where it always should have been and could have been at the end of last year had the opposition taken a more responsible approach.