



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

National Curriculum

SPEECH

Monday, 22 November 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (12.45 pm)—I rise to voice my opposition to the motion put by the member for Sturt. I was interested to hear the comments by the member for Grey about a national curriculum being long overdue. I notice that he is a South Australian as well. I think that Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas also is South Australian, and another South Australian has just entered the chamber. I think all of the previous speakers on this side were from Queensland except for one speaker from Victoria. Not being from New South Wales or Victoria may flavour their views on a national curriculum—with all respect to Victoria of course. I do not know whether South Australia has a different perspective or a different approach to curriculum because convicts did not go there or something like that, but it is interesting to see. I did mention that there was one Victorian—the member for Aston.

But, irrespective of the perspective that we bring to the national curriculum, the motion by the member for Sturt, despite his South Australian connections, is straight out of the Liberal Party playbook written by Tony Abbott, member for Warringah—deny, delay, destroy. In this case it is delay until January 2012. If we look at the position of those members opposite on climate change, a great policy under the Howard government that they would embrace climate change and put a price on carbon became, as soon as the member for Warringah was the leader, ‘Deny, delay, destroy.’ It has been the same with health reform and the NBN. It is just the way that those opposite seem to roll at the moment. I think the member for Sturt is a bit like the kid at school who is trying to organise the fight. He is not actually going to be in the fight but he is out there whispering: ‘Oh, the states aren’t ready yet. The states aren’t supporting this. There’s a fight on; there’s a fight on.’ But there is nothing constructive about something that the member for Grey indicated most sane people connected with education would accept as long overdue.

What is the national curriculum about in the federation of Australia? It is about ensuring that all Australian children get the best possible education regardless of the sign hanging over the front gate. We have had our experiences in the past where we have perhaps been a bit divisive about education. You might remember the 2004 election, Mr Deputy Speaker, where perhaps our policy was not necessarily the best policy in terms of trying to divide between the private and state areas and the haves and the have-nots. Now we understand that education is much more important and that it is not a political football.

We have to do the right thing by the 1,986,715 primary school children and the 1,474,611 secondary school children. Why? Because we do not want to play politics with the education of our kids, particularly with the 80,000 who move between states every year. That is about 2½ per cent of the school population, and a great majority of them would be children of defence personnel. Maybe the fact that we are all connected with the RAAF base at Amberley is why I, the member for Oxley and the member for Blair are particularly passionate about this policy—that we need to get it right. I was a schoolteacher for 11 years, and I know there is nothing worse than kids rocking up and you having to start over with them because they have come from New South Wales or Tasmania and they are not familiar with the syllabus you are using. It would be great if we could get this right for the sake of the defence children and all the children who have to move.

The Labor Party obviously is a party with a proud tradition of providing quality education for all. Look at what we are doing: look at NAPLAN, at the My School website and at increasing school transparency and accountability. The national curriculum is just another brick in that great process. The building block of a fine economy is to make sure that our children are educated.

The national curriculum now has to be fully implemented over the next three years beginning with English, maths, science and history. If I look at my teaching experience, I started in 1986 teaching Latin and Greek roots but finished with the internet. So even though I only had 11 years of teaching it is amazing how much teaching had changed in those 11 years.

Mr Danby—Greek and Latin teaching—

Mr PERRETT—Yes, Latin and Greek roots. Teaching has been transformed. When I started I think it was called ‘the sage on the stage’, but now with the internet it is ‘the guide on the side’. It is different, but still a high-quality process—

Mr Ramsey—I didn’t know we had internet in Australia when you were growing up.

Mr PERRETT—No, it was around in the late 1990s. I think if you move away from your Commodore 64 you will find that! (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.