



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3) 2010-2011

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4) 2010-2011

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 28 February 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

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Ms MARINO (Forrest) (4.48 pm)—Having seconded the amendment moved by the member for Sturt on bringing forward some results as to youth allowance, I rise to speak in support of it. What I am speaking to support is a fair go for young people in my electorate and many thousands of others around Australia. I heard the previous speaker use the word ‘embarrassment’. In my view it is an embarrassment to this government that these students were not considered part of the youth allowance offering to grant equity of opportunity to these young people.

As this House is well aware, the Labor Party’s changes to youth allowance slashed the tertiary education opportunities for regional and rural students right across this nation, and the young people in my electorate were some of the worst hit. This government and the Independents have the opportunity to fix this for the year-2009-10 cohort, and what could be fairer than what we are proposing? Two houses of parliament have supported the changes that we are proposing to independent youth allowance. I encourage all members to support this particular amendment put by the member for Sturt.

We have seen arbitrary lines drawn on a map in relation to the youth allowance. It is a truly dreadful indictment of the government to draw arbitrary lines on a map to differentiate between great young people who are seeking higher education or training, often in the same school, in the same area and in the same town but who are unable to qualify. Unfortunately, this has made an absolute mockery of the government’s education revolution slogan. And unfortunately for the students in my part of the world and perhaps for 20,000 others, it is almost an education devolution because many of them will not be able to access their higher education or training as a result; and, if they do, it will come at great personal cost to their families. Both this House and the Senate have sent a clear message to the government that rural and regional students and their families should be given a fair go. This is all about a fair go for the great young people of this nation; it is a fair go for regional and rural students.

What students in inner regional areas such as those in my electorate of Forrest need is immediate action to give them certainty. Those young people who have done their gap year are at the cusp; they need immediate action. They need certainty. They need youth allowance to be available to them so that they can go on with their higher education dreams and whatever else they want to achieve, particularly, as I said, the year 2009-10 gap-year students. If, for some reason, the discrimination inflicted on regional and rural students through Labor’s legislation was an unintended consequence then Labor have had adequate time to fix it themselves. They have chosen not to, and that really disturbs me. That moves it from being an unintended consequence to one that was calculated, and our young people are the ones who are suffering as a result. The government have blocked every move made by the coalition to prevent this inequity, and that is why we have proposed an amendment. Our amendment aims to end the Labor government’s discrimination for these year 12 students of year 2009-10 and to allow them access to youth allowance at this time. They need access to youth allowance, and they need it now.

I want to briefly touch on the constitutional question that the government used erroneously to avoid ending the discrimination. The government claimed that the coalition bill was an appropriation bill, despite advice from the Clerk of the Senate that it was not. The bill before the House, though, is clearly an appropriation bill. At this moment, there can be absolutely no doubt that this legislation gives the government the opportunity to appropriate the funds for this purpose. It is in the title of the bill. In debate last week, both the Attorney-General and the Leader of the House referred to section 53 of the Constitution, which identifies that appropriation bills must originate in this House—and this bill did. Of course, Labor’s constitutional understanding did not reach the intent of the framers of its legislation to eliminate discrimination in Australia based on location. Members should note that section 51 of the Constitution talks about the Commonwealth having the power to make laws with regard to taxation, but part (ii) states:

... but so as not to discriminate between States or parts of States;

The coalition and I want to encourage and support the great young people who completed year 12 in 2009-10 when they need to move away to undertake their higher education or training. I receive stories about their situation on a daily basis. We heard the member for Sturt quote one of the emails he had received about this. I receive

them on a daily basis. I also meet these people when I am out in the community. These great young people and their great families are being affected by this legislation. I receive emails and phone calls from them, and they are quite desperate. This is an opportunity to fix the legislation for this group. The inequity is a result of Labor policy and this is the opportunity for them to fix it, to address the equity for these young students. Rural and regional students deserve a fair go. This is what this amendment is about: it is about a fair go. At this moment, it is right to resolve this inequity for inner regional students, which is why I have seconded and strongly support the amendment moved by the member for Sturt.