



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Youth Allowance

SPEECH

Thursday, 3 March 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 3 March 2011
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Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (12.51 pm)—I rise to table a nationwide petition signed by just some of those who so strongly oppose the Labor government's discrimination against students who, by the use of arbitrary lines by the government, have been classified as 'inner regional' when applying for independent youth allowance. This petition consists of thousands of signatures from people who believe that rural and regional students should have equity of access to a tertiary education or training.

This Labor government made changes to youth allowance in 2009 which made it harder and, in some instances, impossible for regional students to access higher education or training. Originally I thought this may have been an unintended consequence but the continued resistance the government have shown—and as they have shown again today—to fixing this abominable legislation has unfortunately proven to me that this appears to have been a deliberately discriminatory action. I cannot assume anything else. There can be no other conclusion. The government have had two years to amend the legislation and fix the problems that they have created. Not only have the government chosen not to do so; they have blocked every move by this parliament, by the coalition, to end the discrimination and give certainty to thousands of regional and rural students around the nation. Why wouldn't you want to do that?

The will of the people is represented in this House and members of this House passed the motion to fix the problem. The Senate also conducted an inquiry where students, parents, families and organisations gave overwhelming evidence that the Labor government changes are unfair and have significant health, education and career impacts on regional and rural students. Recently the Senate passed Senator Nash's bill to reinstate the former workplace criteria. But the Labor government have vehemently opposed every opportunity to fix the problem—which can only mean that the government are absolutely determined to continue to discriminate against inner regional students.

I wonder why the government is so intent on denying regional students higher education and training. Why would you do this? The principal petitioner, Linda Brown, from my electorate of Forrest, described the changes to this legislation as 'dumbing down regional students'. She had a daughter who was half-way through doing her gap year when the Prime Minister decided to change the criteria, which meant that her daughter was no longer eligible for a single gap year. The last thing her daughter wanted to do prior to taking on a four-year law degree was to be forced to work for another year—that is, if she can find work in the first place! Amanda Whittle's submission to the Senate committee hearing said:

We live in Bunbury—2 hours from Perth—and I feel discriminated against as my two sons live in this so-called 'Inner Regional' area and will have to work 30 hours per week for 18 months, whereas closer to Perth in a neighbouring town, their friends need only to earn \$19,500 over 12 months. Both go to the same school and both have to live away from home to study in Perth.

I urge—

the Labor government—

to have a fairer system for country families, which should be supporting country students and their families, not disadvantaging them.

I have story after story. My office continues to receive contact over this issue. Unfortunately, young people are choosing not to take university pathways in years 11 and 12 as a result of this. That is a tragedy. This is not the education revolution the Labor government promised. For those students this is education discrimination. This issue is one of equity—equity of access to a tertiary education and a professional career. The parliament has sent clear messages to the Labor government that this legislation is flawed. I have called repeatedly for the Labor government, and those Independents who have voted against every move to end this discrimination, to stop blocking the attempts to give rural and regional students a fair go. I am really disappointed that again the Independents have sold out the interests of their young constituents. In conclusion, I would really like to take

the opportunity to thank Linda Brown and thank my colleagues—the members for Farrer, Grey, Groom, Hume, Murray and Wannon—for their work and effort in collecting signatures.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Is my understanding correct that the honourable member for Forrest wishes to table the petition?

Ms MARINO—I certainly do, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek to incorporate the petition that has gone through the committee.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I understand, as the member points out, that the petition is approved so it will be received pursuant to standing order 207.

Ms MARINO—I am therefore pleased to present this petition.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the **deep concern students, parents and families have, throughout Australia, regarding the Labor Federal Government's changes to Youth Allowance**, In particular the exclusion of students residing In the Inner Regional zone of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification —Remoteness Area (ASGC-RA) map from Subsection ICE (a) of the *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2010*.

The exclusion of the Inner Regional zone has and will continue to disadvantage Australian students within this classification, and deter many students from obtaining a higher education. The lack of financial assistance available for students who must relocate to study is hindering the opportunities of all young people.

We therefore ask the Government and the House to act on Nola Marino's Motion which was passed 28 October 2010 to include Inner Regional students in Subsection ICE (a) of the *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2010*.

from 4,257 citizens

Petition Received.