



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Schools

SPEECH

Tuesday, 21 August 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 21 August 2012
Page 9385
Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:24): I am always happy to rise to talk about education. I commend the member for La Trobe for this optimistic matter of public importance motion. I say optimistic because she is seeking the support of those opposite on education, a topic that is in the nation's interest.

Education is my background. Before I became a lawyer and a member of parliament, I worked in the education sector. I worked in state schools in the country and Catholic schools in the city. I worked as a teacher for 11 years and as a union organiser in the independent education sector. I worked as a union organiser all over regional Queensland dealing with the private school sector. I worked with both the very wealthiest schools in Queensland, where I was proud to be the organiser working with the very first protected action at one of our grammar schools, and some of the very poorest schools: some of the private schools in Aboriginal communities and some of the Christian and Catholic schools where people can barely scrape together enough money for uniforms or even, on occasion, for food. That was my background before coming into the parliament. So I do have a particular understanding of education.

Education is a major reason why many of my colleagues here joined the Labor Party in the first place. If you believe in education, if part of your nature is that you like a fight and if you want to change the world, you normally join the Labor Party. If you like a fight but do not want to change the world, you join the Greens. If you do not want to change the world at all, if you do not want to make any difference, you join the National Party. If you do not want to make a difference and you have had a rails run in life, what do you do? You join the Liberal Party.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I can hear those opposite gagging on their silver spoons. The reality is that, if you believe in education, if you believe in equality and justice and opportunity—those great Labor values that have persisted since we went under the tree of knowledge in Barcaldine in the 1890s—you join the Labor Party.

Mr O'Dowd: It's gone!

Mr PERRETT: We know where it is, and it is our tree, even though it is in your electorate. It is in Barcaldine, and it is our tree of knowledge, not yours. I was so surprised to hear the shadow minister for education, the member for Sturt, state on *Lateline* in July that the socioeconomic status of a student does not impact on their educational outcomes. That is pure bunkum! The reality is that it has a great impact. I have great schools—great state schools and great private schools—in my electorate. Two of the top 10 improving state schools in Queensland—Corinda State High School and MacGregor State High School—are in my electorate. They are big schools. I taught in North Queensland with the principal of one of them. I also have national partnership schools in my electorate. I have small, poor Catholic schools and I have small, poor state schools that are benefiting from the national partnerships program—even the school my son goes to is benefiting, because of its significant African population. So I know the things that impact on improvement.

The reality is that, when it comes to improving the future of Australia, we must invest in education. I know things are good, or reasonably good—it is a patchy economy—but we need to do more. At the moment, the economy is growing at above its long-term average, at its fastest pace in over four years. Compared to the rest of the world, it is miles ahead: low unemployment, 13-year-low inflation, strong consumption growth with high national savings—people have put their credit cards away. That is not good if you are in retail, but the reality is that we are saving more. Out of the 200 economies around the world, ours is one of only seven that have a sovereign AAA credit rating from the three major credit ratings agencies.

How they can get a jeremiad going from next door with these figures I do not know. It is the fastest annual growth in labour productivity in a decade. As we all know, the measure of an economy is its productivity. Sadly, for the last 10 or so years productivity has been flatlining. We need to do more. I will touch on that. But I would

also point out that since election night when we came to office in 2007 there has been \$919 billion of private investment. In fact, in the last quarter we had it at the highest level of GDP percentage in the last 40 years, at 16 per cent. Productivity is what it is all about. That is why you invest in education. It is not just education for education's sake; it is the future of the nation.

I know that those opposite do not like these figures, and they would like to close down my contribution—

Mr Van Manen: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would just like you to bring the member for Moreton back to the topic of the MPI, which is education and bipartisan support to improve our schools. It is nothing to do with the current economic state of the country.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): The honourable member will address the question before the chair.

Mr PERRETT: I did not think we could uncouple education and productivity in any argument. To do that you would have to be a paid-up member of the Flat Earth Society. (*Quorum formed*) It is sad when people are objecting to an MPI on a bipartisan motion about education funding.

I was surprised to read in the paper today the part of the member for Warringah's speech to the Independent Schools Council yesterday where he said:

The 34 per cent of Australians who attend independent schools get just 21 per cent of government funding ... So there is no question of injustice to public schools here. If anything, the injustice is the other way.

That is what they have flagged. They have remarked that at the moment there is too much money going into state schools. That is unbelievable. I do not know how anybody who goes to a state school in their electorate could argue that, for a start. Surely not even in Warringah would we be arguing that those schools have too much money.

The Labor government have doubled the education budget since we came to power. We built 3,000 libraries. What did they contribute over 12 years? It was 3,000 flagpoles. I will stack my libraries up against your flagpoles any day. We will make a great contribution to productivity; you will make a great contribution on Anzac Day. That is good. That is important. But I will take our 3,000 libraries any day. (*Time expired*)