



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Higher Education
SPEECH

Tuesday, 17 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Chesters, Lisa, MP

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Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (15:54): This matter of public importance shows how delusional so many members of the government are about what the Australian people think about their plans for higher education. It does not matter how many times you tell yourselves otherwise, these reforms are unpopular. They are unpopular because people know that deregulation means one thing. It means it will cost regional students—any students—over \$100,000 to do a degree which does not cost that much today. If you deregulate university fees, that allows universities to set their own fees. We already know from universities that have done their modelling, like UWA, that they are going to double and triple their fees. That is what is already out there. We know that this is a guarantee, because this is the same government and the same minister that have not backed down from their 20 per cent cut to the government's contribution towards student university fees. That is how we will get \$100,000 degrees within one year of this reform coming in.

This is not HECS. This is not HELP. This is not Dawkin's original vision for higher education. When HECS was first brought in it opened up the number of university places and increased the number of working kids and people from middle-class backgrounds who could access university based upon their ability. They did not have to be the brightest. They did not have to get 100 per cent—they still had to do well at their school studies—but they still got access to university. That is what Dawkins did. He said if you pay a modest fee, a small contribution, then the government will back you and pay the rest. What the government is trying to do is completely reverse that and say that you should pay the absolute most—up to \$100,000—and we will chip in the last couple of grand. That is not a fair education system. This government is trying to unwind that fundamental principle where your brains and your ability decide whether you go to university.

This government is touting the scholarship system and saying it is great. There will be scholarships for kids from working class—low SES—backgrounds. What this government does not tell you is that you have to be the absolute brightest. You may be bright and you may have the skills, but if you do not have the money—the trust fund—then you cannot have access to that place. Scholarships and these fees do one thing: the absolute brightest—that top one per cent—can go to university. The rest of you—unless you have the money in your bank account—cannot go to university. Unless you are willing to get into debt, you cannot go to university.

As we have ready heard from the speakers on this side, by 2020 two out of three jobs will need a higher education. They will need a university degree. This government just wants to exclude people from going to university. This government also does not understand the importance of having a highly educated workforce to be able to do those two out of three jobs. The minister likes to stand up and say that factory workers resent having to pay their taxes so that people can go to university. I have never met a factory worker or a cleaner who did not want their children to go to university. Jamal Babaka, who is an office cleaner in Melbourne, said to me very clearly: 'I'm a cleaner. I don't want my children to be cleaners. I work hard and pay my taxes so my children have the opportunity to go to university.' That is what is great about Australia—that a shopping centre cleaner can have three children go to university and go on to be psychologists, teachers and early childhood educators. That is the Australia I am proud of. That is what this government should be standing up for. This government should be making sure that the children of every cleaner and every factory worker have an opportunity to go to university.

These reforms do not do this. They attack working people. They attack people in the regions. They attack people who simply want a better Australia and an opportunity for everybody to go to university. This government should stand condemned for being a government that is going to deny a generation of young people the opportunity to go to university.

This young generation will be the first generation in many decades not to have the opportunity that I had and many on the front bench had. That is the problem with the government. They are out of touch and do not understand the implications of their reforms. (*Time expired*)