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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Employment**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 27 February 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Bird, Sharon, MP

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**Question No.**

**Ms BIRD** (Cunningham) (12:34): I also want to talk about unemployment and jobs today. Indeed, my own area of the Illawarra was identified as the second-highest in New South Wales in a recent survey about youth unemployment. It is a very, very important issue that many of us face. I want to commence my comments by also expressing my own personal care and concern for thousands of workers who today are in a terribly difficult circumstance as a result of Qantas's announcements and the many hundreds who have been affected more recently by announcements in the automotive industry and Alcoa. Coming from the Illawarra, I and my colleague, the member for Throsby, went through this situation not all that long ago, with the restructuring of BlueScope. It is a good outcome for BlueScope in the long-term and there has been some good reporting for the current year, but it was a really tough time for hundreds of workers in our area. So I sincerely acknowledge that it is a particularly tough time for them now.

I want to report to the House that the member for Throsby and I attended on 19 February a jobs expo in the Illawarra. This was a really tremendous outcome. It directly flows from the investment that the federal Labor government made in the area through the Illawarra Regional Innovation and Investment Fund, which was established following the BlueScope announcement, and the work of the local employment coordinator, Jane Robertson, on positions that were established for local employment priority areas by former Prime Minister Rudd at the time when the global financial crisis was hitting and we need to shore up employment opportunities in local areas. Jane and her team have been organising these job expos as a way to link the companies that got funding—and, indeed, any other companies in the area that had job opportunities—with job seekers in the local area. They had a tremendous turn-out. Over 300 jobs were available as well as training places available on the day, and the expo was very well attended, as they always are.

I was able to catch up with four companies there who were direct recipients of the funding program under the Illawarra Regional Innovation and Investment Fund. It was a co-funding program. So the companies themselves were investing money in collaboration with the federal government and they were then obviously to create jobs out of that—that is the whole purpose of it. Four of those companies were there on the day with jobs available. Internet Solutions Australia Pty Ltd is a computer-based platforms company that is doing very well—not only Wollongong established and developed but also now trading internationally. They were targeted for six jobs for their particular program. Also there was Skydive the Beach, which is quite an alternate and very different type of program, involving jumping out of planes skydiving—something that they were trying to encourage me to undertake but I was pleased to see them prosper without my participation. They indicated to me that their target was 20 jobs and they are actually exceeding their target for recruiting people into that business. So that is another great story.

Superfine in Focus is a printing company—so still jobs and opportunities in the broader manufacturing sector. They do a lot of the mass printing that we would be familiar with around catalogues and things like that. They established in the Illawarra as a result of that fund. Their target was 190 jobs and they said that they are well on the way to that target. These are not only full-time jobs; they are also particularly targeting apprentices—which goes to the issue that the previous speaker was talking about in terms of those entry level opportunities into the job market for young people. They were very keen, though, to tell me that their apprentices have ranged from 18 to 56 years old. So they are also targeting and recruiting mature-age apprentices. That is great, because that is part of the story that we want to engage with the BlueScope workers about—that there would be opportunities for mature-age workers as well. South Coast Private Pty Ltd are a mental health facility, and they were there at the expo recruiting as well.

There were some good outcomes—recognising that these are tough times—and I want to acknowledge the great work of the local employment coordinator, AusIndustry and our Department of Human Services, who were all there to work on the day.