



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Bendigo Electorate: Volunteers

SPEECH

Thursday, 5 May 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Chesters, Lisa, MP

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Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (12:00): The Bendigo electorate is a diverse electorate. It is a country electorate, and therefore takes in lots of smaller towns as well as the large population centre. But our diversity is also our strength. I just want to place on the record, and give a bit of a shout out to, the many organisations that help make our part of the world a great place; our volunteer organisations in the Macedon Ranges, Mount Alexander and Bendigo; and the critical volunteers that help other volunteers connect with organisations.

Next week is Volunteer Week in our part of the world, and it is disappointing that I leave this place to inform them that there has been a \$12 million cut to support services for our volunteer organisations in this budget. I would like to give a shout out to our SES and CFA—volunteer-based organisations that help make sure that, in an emergency, our homes and roads are protected and safe. Unfortunately, this government's closure of the Australian Emergency Management Institute after their first budget has hurt the coordination and our ability to respond. I hope that this will not continue into the future.

This is a shout out to our environmental groups—and we have so many in central Victoria that are connecting and switching to green energy. For example, there is MASH, based in Castlemaine, a bulk-solar organisation purchasing bulk solar and helping to connect more homes, businesses and community organisations to green energy. And you cannot go past the people's republic of Newstead and their plan to go 100 per cent renewable energy.

Our small business organisations work hard to make sure that they are sharing networks and that they are supporting one another. A big shout out to the organisations that I am a member of: the Bendigo Business Council and Networking Bendigo. I know they have been watching and listening to the detail of this budget—and the devil is in the detail of this budget. They will be concerned, like I am, that small business measures will be extended to include businesses of up to \$1 billion in turnover. There are not too many small businesses in my part of the world that have that kind of turnover.

A big shout out to the Believe in Bendigo crew who, when our community was faced with a big challenge, stepped up to say: 'We believe in Bendigo. We are an inclusive and multicultural community. We are donning the yellow and coming together to celebrate our diverse cultures and to share them.' To the businesses, the organisations, the counsellors and my state colleagues: we came together under yellow to say that we believed in Bendigo. It was a moment for our community to say that we do not support the policies of the UPF; that we support our council and are moving forward to be able to build our first mosque in Bendigo.

A big shout out to our welfare and support organisations like the Salvation Army, Uniting Care and St Vincent de Paul and organisations like Saltworks, who have also suffered under massive cuts by this government in their first, second and now third budget. They are still getting on to support the most vulnerable people in our community, despite having less funding to do so. The Bendigo community have stepped up to help them. They say that demand for their services has increased by 30 per cent over the last three years and yet they have less support from this government, and that is where this government's priorities are wrong.

To the schools in our electorate who are campaigning strongly for equity-based funding: I stand with you. Whether it be our smaller primary schools like Taradale Primary School or Eppalock Primary School, or our larger schools like Bendigo Senior Secondary College, every single school in the Bendigo electorate would have benefited from Gonski funding, so therefore every school will suffer a cut because this government is not restoring the full Gonski funding in this budget.

As I said, the strength of our community is our diversity. We reach out to make sure that nobody is left behind. We are people that work together to grow our businesses, to make sure that nobody is left behind and to build a strong and inclusive community. The failure of this government is: it has not got behind the people of Bendigo and central Victoria. Its policies have failed to really understand what is going on. One of the clearest areas

where this government has failed and let people down is in relation to the workers of Bendigo. Eighty-five per cent of the workers of Bendigo earn less than \$75,000 a year. On budget night, this government said that they were not entitled and did not earn enough to get a tax cut. It is ridiculous to suggest that some of our lowest-paid workers are not worthy of this kind of attention. The government has let Bendigo and central Victoria down.
(Time expired)