



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Rural Clinical Schools

SPEECH

Monday, 9 December 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 9 December 2013
Page 2079
Questioner
Speaker Bird, Sharon, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (13:28): Thank you for the opportunity to briefly add to this debate. I am very pleased to be able to support the intention of the motion that was moved by the member for Murray. To take up the point made by my colleague the member for Parramatta, I will talk about the ongoing commitment that the previous Labor government gave to the work of establishing the training opportunities for young people in rural and regional Australia so that we could aim to keep workforces in those areas.

As one example, when I was the Minister for Higher Education and Skills in May this year I was very pleased to announce \$59 million for the La Trobe Rural Health School. That was designed specifically to ensure that rural Victorians would benefit from up to 1,700 extra health professionals that would be produced by that rural health school over the four years. We were also announcing new facilities that were being built at that particular facility. The school was a boost for the local community, obviously, and for regional Victoria more broadly. It will bring new students into the area and provide training and education opportunities for young people who already live in the area. It is specifically aimed at addressing regional Victoria's need for more allied health professionals.

It was a great joy to be at that particular announcement and it was very welcome. In fact, we were told that, in the range of fields that the students would be studying, they are significantly more likely to stay in a regional area having studied in a regional facility. The same was true at La Trobe. The university's Vice Chancellor Professor John Dewar said that 71 per cent of graduates from the campus choose to continue to work in regional Victoria, so it is an issue that the previous Labor government continued to give a great focus to.

One of the important parts of that particular initiative was also the provision of funding for student accommodation, and I was very pleased to be able also to attend the new housing that we had funded in areas like Shepparton and Albury-Wodonga in order to provide accommodation for students when they were doing their placements. Under the Education Investment Fund we put significant money into those sorts of facilities.

I also want to take the opportunity to recognise my own university in my hometown of Wollongong, which has a medical school as well. They have very strong links with GP services across regional and rural New South Wales, again with a view to having students from those areas recruited into the courses and to sustain their links with their regional hometowns to be able to do placements in those areas and to be supported by the university in doing that. Again, it is exactly targeted at providing a workforce. It is such an important issue for our rural and regional areas.

I particularly want to acknowledge that the Pro Vice Chancellor of Health from the University of Wollongong is a fantastic man called Professor Don Iverson. Sadly we have just been informed that he will be resigning from his position at the university. He was appointed the Dean of the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences at the university in July 2001. In December 2006 he was made executive dean of the faculty, and in June 2009 he was made Pro Vice Chancellor (Health). He also functions as the executive director for a very important medical research facility at the university, the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, and the money for that was announced by the previous Labor state government.

He had an extensive and illustrious career in the US and Canada before he came to Wollongong. The partnership that he leads in medical research between the university and the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service has been very strongly focused on creating partnerships with community; with professionals working in our community, particular in the area of cancer research, as well as with many of the local community organisations who fundraise and work to support people in our local area.

Don Iverson is loved across the community. It is not often that you come into a huge place like the University of Wollongong and have a whole community know who you are, and that is absolutely the case with Don. He has been a huge asset to our university and to our region. I want to pay a great tribute to the work that he has done, to wish him all the best in his future endeavours and to assure him that he will always be welcome to address

health issues in Wollongong at any time—to come and knock on my door, it will always be open to him. I pay tribute to his community service.

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 13:33 to 16:00