



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

SPEECH

Thursday, 7 February 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Bandt, Adam, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (15:14): I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Melbourne moving the following motion forthwith—

That private Members' business item No. 12, Government investment in research, standing in the name of the Member for Melbourne on the Notice Paper, be returned from the Federation Chamber and considered immediately

There was a motion that everyone thought we were going to be voting on today. That is a motion that, amongst other things, notes the growing concern amongst the science and research community about security of funding. The important and operative part calls on the Treasurer to guarantee that science and research funding will be protected this financial year and rule out any attempt to defer, freeze or pause Australia Research Council, National Health and Medical Research Council or other science and research grants in an attempt to achieve a budget surplus.

This was a motion that was debated in October last year. This was a motion that the selection committee recommended for a vote. This was a motion that was expected to turn up on the *Notice Paper* today. But, when we turned up, the motion was not included on the *Notice Paper*. There are a number of potential reasons for that. One might be that the motion was likely to succeed. I anticipate that there will be a significant amount of support from the crossbench, and I understand the coalition may even be supporting it as well. If that is the reason for its omission, that is of concern. Private members' motions in this place that have been through the proper process and have been waiting since last year for a vote ought not be pulled simply because of the potential outcome. I also know, of course, that there has been a recent reshuffle and that there is a new science and research minister. But this is not a motion that calls on the science and research minister to do anything. It is a motion that calls on the Treasurer to make certain guarantees.

It is urgent that we suspend standing orders and vote on this now, because now is obviously the time that the government is beginning the process of preparing the budget. Budget preparation time is a time of growing and great consternation amongst many in the science and research community in this country. In MYEFO we saw the sustainable research excellence program cut by half a billion dollars over the forward estimates. Two budgets before that, scientists and researchers had to mobilise in their lab coats in their thousands around the country to prevent mooted cuts to health and medical research.

In our view, the reason that we are in this problem where the government is looking around at places like science to save some money is because of the failure to secure the country's revenue base and raise the money that we need to fund the services and expenditures that Australians expect. One of those, which is in my electorate of Melbourne but especially in Victoria, is the area of science and research. We need to be clear that science and research ought not be a honeypot that governments go back to every time they need a bit of money to make the budget balance. Science and research will be a foundation of a clean economy and will set us up for after the mining boom. The cuts of course hurt jobs. The cuts to the sustainable research excellence program are going to hurt, according to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research at Melbourne University, with somewhere in the order of 1,400 jobs being threatened. Those jobs are just as important as jobs in the manufacturing industry. It is not just the cuts, it is the speculation—

Mr Albanese: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. I do not wish to disrupt the member for Melbourne's time, but I do not have a copy of the motion that has been moved, so it is not clear to me what the implications are. Perhaps it could be indicated whether there is a seconder for the motion and then, if we could get a copy of it once it has been seconded, that might suit the convenience of the House.

The SPEAKER: The member for Melbourne has the call and, if he could make available a copy of the motion to the attendant, could the attendant take the copy and photocopy it, please.

Mr BANDT: I have a copy of the motion available here. The cuts to sustainable research excellence are going to hurt somewhere in the order of 1,400 jobs. It is not just cuts but speculation that hurts jobs as well because, if you are researcher wanting to start out in Australia, you should know that, whoever is in government, your funding is going to be secure. You should know from budget to budget that the whole of the parliament treats science and research with sufficient importance that it is not going to be tinkered with from budget to budget. Every time there is speculation in the lead-up to the budget it affects the choices that people make and it affects the ability of external investment, especially from the private sector, to join in and invest in world-leading health and medical research that goes on in Australia, especially in Victoria.

What I hope is that we have the opportunity in this parliament to put some of these issues beyond doubt and take them out of the realm of party politics, and that is what the motion is intended to do. The motion intended to lay the groundwork for the budget. It was not even calling for an increase in funding, but just calling for no cuts. That should be something that is very easy to be agreed upon and, if we agree upon it now, it will give a lot of people a lot more security over the coming months. So, I do hope that this House allows this motion to be brought on, not only to allow the processing of private members' business in an orderly fashion so that when we think a motion is going to be voted on it is voted on, but also to give some security to the scientists and researchers around this country that we are not going to come back and raid them and their budgets time and time again simply because we have been unable to secure this country's revenue base.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?