



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Science

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Karen, MP

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Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (10:45): I want to take a few moments today to thank the many people who took part in the Science Meets Parliament program last week, and to congratulate and thank Science and Technology Australia on their work in organising the event.

This was the 14th annual Science Meets Parliament. Bringing together more than 200 scientists with parliamentarians from across the spectrum is a huge task, but a very worthwhile one in order to ensure we continue to foster good communications and understanding between the scientific community and government. As chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Science Group, it was a great pleasure to address the dinner last Monday night in the Great Hall. I made a couple of comments during that speech that I would like to put on the record today. Firstly, I believe it is important that parliamentarians of all political persuasions remain open and less partisan when it comes to discussing the nature of scientific debate and opinion. Secondly, as someone with a love of science and a degree in engineering, I always feel a little uneasy when a parliamentarian declares 'the science is settled' as a means of advocating a particular policy. Science is never entirely settled because when questioning of scientific theory stops, so too does our capacity to develop deeper understanding and discover new scientific theories.

Fittingly, last week nominations were opened for the 2014 Prime Minister's Prizes for Science, which include recognition of excellence in teaching for both primary and secondary school teachers. I have contacted all schools in my electorate, asking them to nominate an outstanding science teacher, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do the same. The more we can promote the study of science, the sooner we can stop the decline we have seen over the past two decades when it comes to the study of maths and science in our schools.

Sadly, Australian graduation rates in the mathematical sciences run at only half the OECD average for men and one-third for women. More than 30 per cent of secondary maths classes are taught by staff not trained as maths teachers. And since 1995 there has been a 30 per cent drop in students enrolling in intermediate and advanced maths, which has a flowthrough effect on the supply of graduates, teachers and mathematically literate Australians in industry. This is causing a devastating ripple effect throughout higher education, research and industry. Encouraging our students to study science, of course, begins in our schools.

In concluding today, I extend thanks to both the organisers and the sponsors of Science Meets Parliament. I also reiterate my support for greater communications and understanding between parliament and the scientific community. I commit myself to personally doing all I can to foster closer relationships, and I welcome and encourage all members of this parliament to join the Friends of Science Group.