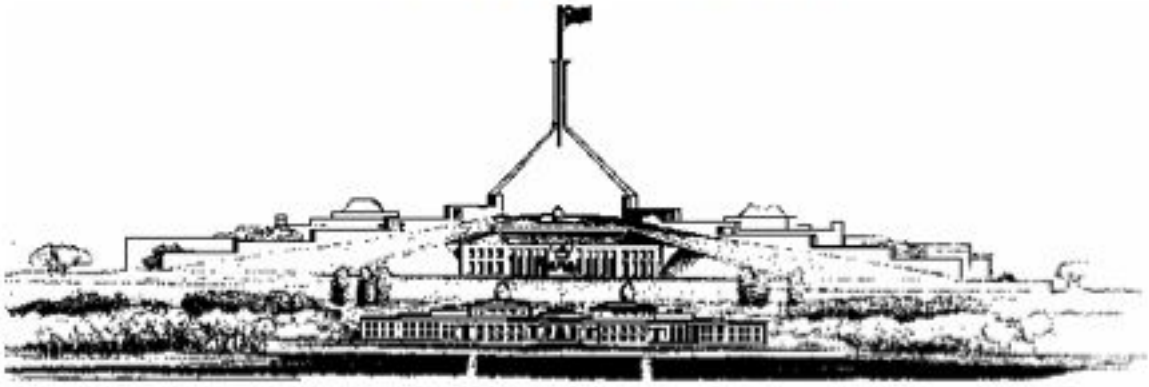
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Science Curriculum

SPEECH

Monday, 23 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date	Monday, 23 May 2011	**Source**	House
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Questioner		**Responder**	
Speaker	Marino, Nola, MP	**Question No.**	

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (19:41): I support the motion of the member for Sturt on the science curriculum. When the Prime Minister addressed the US congress earlier this year she said:

… our societies share a deep commitment to the value of education. We understand education's transformative power. We know education is the future for every child who learns. We also know education is the future for our economies.

The Prime Minister also said:

We must work together to achieve an historic transition to high technology, high skill, clean energy economies.

But the Prime Minister did not tell the Americans that she was about to cut a highly successful science program which directly undermines the capacity and opportunity for Australian teachers to access the materials they need to assist them in teaching our children science.

In April, a number of previous winners of the Prime Minister's Science Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Primary Schools wrote to the Prime Minister asking her not to cut funding to the PrimaryConnections program. In that letter some of our best and most dedicated science teachers in this country told the Prime Minister:

The Primary Connections program is such an outstanding success with classroom teachers because it gives support at differing levels, from complete step by step instruction, to supporting teachers in developing their own teaching modules using the background information given.

The teachers also told the Prime Minister that the program was so good that young graduates were buying the PrimaryConnections materials with their own money. What a resounding endorsement. The PrimaryConnections program was in the process of becoming self-funding and sustainable through sales to schools, but the government has axed it. This is a program that deserves support because it delivers real results.

The Australian Council of Deans of Science report *Who ' s teaching science?* of 2005 was prepared by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. It highlighted that there was a shortage of teachers with strong science skills, especially in the tough science subjects of physics and chemistry. One of the reasons for this shortage was that teachers were leaving the profession to find employment elsewhere because of the lack of support for science teachers and that was in part driving the exodus. Cutting this support even further is really a national disgrace.

Science By Doing is a national initiative which aims to actively engage junior secondary school students in learning science through an inquiry based approach. The project is managed by the Australian Academy of Science in conjunction with CSIRO, the Australian Science Teachers Association and state education departments. The purpose of Science By Doing is described by the Australian Academy of Science as to improve science learning by engaging secondary students through an inquiry based approach and supporting school based learning communities that acknowledge and build upon teacher expertise.

Support for both these programs is widespread. Quite simply, they are very good programs. Individual teachers have contacted me. They are profoundly disappointed by this decision by the government. How will teachers now keep up with the rapid pace of developments in technologies without the resources of PrimaryConnections? The Australian Science Teachers Association and the Australian Primary Principals Association have also expressed their shock that the government would contemplate dumping these programs and are opposed to the proposed cuts. If education is the future of our economy, as the Prime Minister told the American congress, it looks like that economy will not be relying on the government to support science education for our students or in supporting our science teachers. We certainly face many challenges as a nation. Providing and provoking both an interest and an education in science is integral not only to understanding nature and life but to continuous cutting-edge research and to development and technology, and essentially it is our future. I note that Cheryl Capra, a

Queensland science teacher who studied astronomy and now helps train other teachers, was quoted as saying that PrimaryConnections has been a tremendous boost to science learning throughout Australia in primary schools but its job is not finished even with the national curriculum on the doorstep. I note that Australian Academy of Science president Suzanne Cory says PrimaryConnections needs another $1.5 million over two years to make it self-sustaining and that the program will not be able to update and keep teachers abreast of rapid developments in technology, and what they really need is improved and inspirational science teaching such as that that has been available through this science program.

So I support the PrimaryConnections program. I strongly support the motion by the member for Sturt.