



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013,  
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2012-2013,  
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments)  
Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013, Appropriation Bill (No. 5)  
2011-2012, Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2011-2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 23 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 23 May 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** King, Catherine, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms KING** (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (18:14): I rise today in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-13 and the other appropriation bills. This is a budget that Labor people can be very, very proud of. It is a budget that assists families with the costs of living; it is a budget that invests in skills and training across the nation; it is a budget that invests in health, in ageing and in vital infrastructure; and it is a budget that will return our budget to surplus. It is a Labor budget. It is what Labor governments do when they are in government. It stands in stark contrast to both the commentary and the actions of the federal Liberal Party, and it stands in stark contrast to the state budgets of the Liberal Party governments who are in Victoria and in New South Wales. This budget is squarely focused on assisting families and low- and middle-income earners. It is a budget that generates wealth, but it is also a budget that is fair. It is a budget that focuses squarely on helping families. It is a budget that focuses squarely on low- and middle-income earners and those that might be left behind in our economy.

I want to focus on a few issues that to me are the crux of this budget and its assistance to families. The schoolkids bonus is one. Across the federal electorate of Ballarat, over 9,950 families are expected to receive \$410 a year for each child in primary school and \$820 a year for each child in high school. It equates to some \$10.5 million going straight into the pockets of families who live in the electorate of Ballarat and who send their children to primary or secondary school. The payment replaces the education tax refund. It was estimated that in my electorate there are some 1,800 families who never claimed the education tax refund but who were entitled to do so. Structuring the schoolkids bonus in this way means that families do not have to keep receipts and do not have to claim; they will get this as an automatic payment. It is very important in my area—\$10.5 million is being invested in local families, and that money will come into my economy. What we saw from the Liberal Party was that they opposed the schoolkids bonus. Apart from being a stunningly ridiculous political tactic, it just sends a very clear signal to all of those families in my electorate that the Liberal Party do not understand what is happening with families in the electorate of Ballarat. Their opposition to the schoolkids bonus stands in stark contrast to the federal government's proposal of the schoolkids bonus and the eventual passage of it through this parliament.

The other area which I think is very important for families in my electorate is the family tax benefit part A. The federal budget is focused on spreading the wealth from the mining boom to those families that need it most. We acknowledge that mining is a very vital part of our economy, but we also acknowledge that wealth that has been generated is not being spread evenly. We want to be able to make sure that people in our economy are not left behind, and it is very important that families do not get left behind. As part of our budget we are increasing the family tax benefit part A payments to over 12,000 families in my electorate. That is an increase of over \$600 which will start flowing from 1 July next year and will assist families with cost-of-living pressures.

Very importantly, I was very pleased to see in the budget that we are investing \$1.1 billion to establish a new supplementary allowance to assist those people who have been hit particularly hard in recent times by the rising costs of living, such as those Australians who are unemployed—and I think many of us in this place acknowledge how difficult it is for people who are on unemployment benefits. Students or single parents who are on income support will now have access to this new supplementary allowance. The allowance is \$250 for singles and \$350 for couples who will benefit, and that is some 11,000 families in my electorate of Ballarat. That allowance will assist people across my electorate with the costs of electricity, gas and water, to name just a few things.

The other area that I think has been very important and widely well received is aged-care reform. Of course, it comes on the back of our historic increases to the pension. It was a Labor government that for the first time in 100 years increased the base rate of pension, because that is the sort of reform that Labor governments do. It was a historic reform and it has increased the pension by an extra \$338 a year for singles and \$510 for couples as additional payments.

The foundation for the government's sweeping reforms in aged care is also contained in the budget. To support our region's ageing population a new \$3.7 billion funding commitment towards aged-care reform will see more

in-home care support so people can live independently longer and will not be forced to sell the family home to pay for a bond in a nursing home. It will make access to aged care simpler from next year and will ensure that older Australians can receive care at home through a dramatic increase in home care packages. We have the circumstance in many cases across the country where people are assessed as eligible for community aged-care packages or dementia aged-care packages but are not able to receive them because there is a waiting list for those packages. By doubling the number of those in-home care packages we are making sure that there are more older people who can have the choice to stay at home for longer. Over the next 10 years the government's reforms will more than double that number of home care packages.

The government is also funding its fair share of building a National Disability Insurance Scheme through an investment of \$1 billion over four years to start the scheme. From the middle of next year selected launch sites across the country will begin serving people with a disability. Many of the 7,000 people who access a disability support pension across my own electorate will hopefully benefit from this investment. It is a historic announcement for our nation. The approaches we have had to disability services in this country, frankly, have been a disgrace. We all know it is time for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and I dearly hope that state governments will come to the party and pay their fair share of the National Disability Insurance Scheme as well. We have had the arguments about this and the time has come to actually deliver this to the many people who have disabilities in our country.

Employment training and skills is something that, again, I am particularly proud of with the record of this government. I am particularly proud that in this budget we have continued our ongoing commitment to skills and training. It follows on, obviously, from our \$3 billion over six years in the previous budget to skill Australia's future workforce. As part of this budget we have seen the investment of over \$18 million to establish three Australian skills centres of excellence which are giving 21st century education to workers to prepare for the latest emerging industries. In addition the My Skills website will be improved to give greater detail on the quality and location of training providers. It will assist those looking for training and jobs on the ground with the greatest possible opportunities for their future. The National Workforce Development Fund is receiving a \$35 million injection that will see mature-age workers upskilled to reskill across a number of areas where a shortage in skills is identified.

In addition to this some \$19.4 million has been allocated to tradespeople who have recently become qualified to start up their own businesses. This funding will be used to help those who are finishing their apprenticeships to train in business and finance. We are also providing some \$4.2 million to the Australian Skills Quality Authority to support higher quality training. We are investing some \$225.1 million over four years in the very successful and very important Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance Program. It helps parents on income support to receive the training and skills they need to re-enter the workforce. It is a very important program.

The Gillard government have also offered the Victorian government more than \$2.2 billion to support their reform of the training system, because we know the importance of investing in the skills and training of the Australian people. It is really important to emphasise that. The cuts to TAFE funding we have seen from the Victorian Liberal government are, frankly, unbelievable. It is politically unexplainable and counter to all of the work that we have been doing as a nation in developing skills and encouraging people to get into training.

Last week the University of Ballarat—it is one of the few dual sector universities in the country; it has a university and a TAFE—announced that it will have to reduce its courses and jobs as a result of the cuts. It is a disastrous outcome and one which totally ignores the vital national drive to continue to develop the quality workforce which is being demanded by industry. The Victorian government needs to explain how TAFEs can retain courses and continue to deliver skills to industry, and support regions and communities like my own, in the face of these substantial cuts to funding. The TAFE network is an essential public institution and one which the Gillard government values very highly. We have invested some \$224 million in TAFEs over the last four years through projects that have upgraded facilities and equipment in 39 campuses across Victoria, in addition to the \$360 million in funding provided on average each year.

Recently, this government provided \$25 million to the University of Ballarat to lift education participation across the region. We are one of the regions that has a very low participation rate of postsecondary education. When you look up in the west of Victoria, past my electorate of Ballarat, into the Wimmera, into the member for Wannon's electorate, and on into the member for Mallee's electorate, the participation rates are even lower still. We have provided \$25 million to the University of Ballarat to work with other TAFE providers to actually get TAFE

education into these regions, but the state government, at the same time as we are investing \$25 million in the University of Ballarat, has cut \$20 million—40 per cent of the TAFE funding to the University of Ballarat. It is unsustainable and must be reversed.

TAFE is absolutely at the front line when it comes to giving the people of Ballarat and the regions the skills that they need to get a job. The Victorian government is risking significant skills shortages with its budget cuts, when some of the state's biggest training providers, like the University of Ballarat, are forced to downsize and reduce their courses. I am advised that the Victorian government decision will see funding at the University of Ballarat decrease by around \$20 million—around 40 per cent of total TAFE funding. In excess of 50 TAFE courses are going to close.

Staff and students at the university are absolutely shocked by the decision, and I am particularly concerned that the decision is affecting some of the most vulnerable in our community, particularly those who have disabilities, who have learning difficulties and who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. I know community leaders and the local business community have strongly condemned this decision. Not only will we not be developing people with the skills we need in this region, we will be putting quality trainers on the scrap heap. I urge families across my electorate to go along to the rally that is being held tomorrow at the University of Ballarat's SMB campus at 12:30. I know from Facebook that there are many, many people who have never been engaged in political rallies before who have been activated by this government's decision.

To me, it is an absolutely perfect example of why you need to not just listen to some of the spin that comes from Liberal politicians about what they think is a good policy outcome but actually look at what they do. Have a look at what Liberal governments are doing in states like my own, Victoria. They have an ideological opposition to TAFE, they have had for a very long time period of time, and they want to kill it. You can see no better example than what is happening in Victoria at the moment.

Frankly, I find it absolutely astounding and I think many National Party MPs in Victoria are dismayed at the decision. The minister in Victoria is dismayed at the decision that he has now had to go out and sell. I am sure it is not one he supports.

But what I say very clearly is: have a look at what good Labor governments do—what we do in terms of helping families; what we do about making sure we support low and middle income Australians; what we do to develop education, health, infrastructure and skills. Then have a really good look at what Liberal governments do in the states of Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. Have a look at what they actually do when they are in government, and have a good think about what that might mean federally.

The Australian people should be under no illusion that, if the Leader of the Opposition became Prime Minister, then we would once again see a Liberal government that rips funding out of education, that rips funding out of training and skills, that rips funding out of health and, instead, looks after its mates at the big end of town.

In conclusion, I want to say that the budget in my electorate has also invested significantly in health infrastructure. That has come on the back of the \$42 million commitment to the Ballarat Regional Integrated Cancer Centre. We are also seeing \$1.6 million go to Ballarat District Nursing and Healthcare, and \$3.3 million to Ballan District Health and Care. I am very proud of the record that we have in my electorate of investment in infrastructure in health, and in roads, and in education, both within our TAFE and within our University of Ballarat. That is what good Labor governments do, and I am very proud to support this budget here in the appropriation bills.