



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Employment

SPEECH

Wednesday, 18 June 2014

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Page 6506
Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:05): I have been listening closely to the contributions from those opposite—not from within the chamber but in my office. I would like to commend the member for Ryan for one thing, and that is the maroon scarf around her neck. However, I condemn her and the people that she is sitting with for the heavy burden they have sadly put around the necks of young Australians. We were led to believe before the election that the Prime Minister, the member for Warringah, would fight for Australian jobs. He has a record of being a fighter, a boxer, but, sadly, we have seen so many jobs go offshore—jobs that will never come back—particularly in manufacturing, when he said that Australia would always have a manufacturing sector. He has neglected it on his watch.

In fact, my opponent, the member for Warringah's candidate, promised an LNP commitment that there would be a jobs forum in the electorate of Moreton within 100 days of gaining office. Nearly 300 days in and there is still no jobs forum, despite me writing to two ministers about it and asking them to keep their word. On the south side of Brisbane, most of the electorate of Moreton has a youth unemployment rate nudging 15 per cent. Sadly, we are also seeing cuts in the TAFE sector in Queensland. John-Paul Langbroek is committed to closing one in three TAFEs—it is a horrible fact to acknowledge on National TAFE Day, but that is the reality facing Queenslanders. As we have heard from other speakers from other states around this nation, they have all been impacted—and they will be impacted further by the short-sighted decision to cut \$2 billion from schools and training programs.

We have a government that is happy to commit to that Queensland government policy of 10 years ago of 'earning or learning', yet they are ripping money away from programs that actually provide support to young people in apprenticeships and to help them get into employment and education. We should be responding to the issue of youth unemployment by investing in young people, not cutting them off when they most need help.

On National TAFE Day I acknowledge that, over the last 40 years, TAFE has emerged as one of the top vocational education systems in the world, as the traditional master and apprenticeship scheme has changed and evolved to reflect the modern world. So why does Queensland state government policy not recognise TAFEs achievements—its contribution to our society and the incredible skills of the teachers who work there? Instead they have decided to savagely cut investment in TAFEs.

Last year the Newman Queensland government announced details of reforms which will make all public funding contestable. It will remove all assets from TAFE Queensland, introduce HECS student loans to make students pay even more for training, and restrict access to places at TAFE for many students. In fact, the recent Queensland budget announced that campuses will be opened up for use by for-profit providers and 38 TAFE colleges look likely to close.

We need more skilled workers. We have employers calling out to people from around the world to come over on 457 visas because they cannot find enough skilled workers in Queensland and other parts of Australia. We need more plumbers, more electricians, more carpenters and more fitters and turners. The Labor government helped 21,000 Australians access an apprenticeship through the Kickstart initiative. Thanks to Labor, senior high school students across Australia have better access to trade training centres. However, we have also seen TAFE fees soaring in many places. It has disastrous consequences when these fees go up, particularly for poorer families—and especially when someone is the first person in their family to go on to higher learning.

In Queensland we have seen a crazy situation where some fees have now increased tenfold, or 1,000 per cent, which is way beyond the reach of ordinary working people. For example, a Diploma of Sustainability course in Cairns went up from \$439 in 2013 to more than \$6,000 this year. This information is from Curtis Pitt, the state member for Mulgrave. Her son's ambition is to work in film and television and the fee for that course rose from \$3,000 in one year to more than \$20,000. Those fees make such courses out of the reach of ordinary Australians, particularly poorer Australians. Despite the empty words of those opposite, we are not seeing an improvement in long-term unemployment or in opportunities for young people.