



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

National Science Week

SPEECH

Thursday, 20 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 20 August 2015
Page 9137
Questioner
Speaker Bandt, Adam, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (11:42): This week we are celebrating National Science Week across the country. On Tuesday some scientists and researchers doing incredible projects which are being funded by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, ARENA, came to Parliament House to show all parliamentarians their outstanding, world-changing work. While I was there I met many of the dedicated scientists and researchers who are in the middle of launching projects that could fundamentally disrupt and change the way our cities and our towns source energy within our lifetimes, potentially within the next decade. CSIRO, Monash University and Melbourne University are part of a consortium which can print solar cells; printable solar cells are rolling off the line right now. Just imagine: when you are able to print solar cells directly onto rooftop materials—onto corrugated iron—you will not need to install a new solar panel; the roof will be the solar panel. There were incredible advancements going on in energy storage from UltraBattery and Ecoult, where there is the great prospect of being able to store the energy the sun produces during the day so that every home or every business can use it overnight. We saw great companies like Reposit Power, who were looking at how to integrate that back into the grid so that every household can have some freedom from energy companies. We saw the great work being done by NICTA, who are putting together a national map of renewable energy so that anyone can go online and find out where the best place is to generate renewable energy and to build a new wind farm or put up new solar panels.

Standing in that room, I felt incredibly proud knowing that in the last government, when we had a power-sharing arrangement, it was the Greens who came up with the idea of ARENA and secured its existence and its ongoing funding. But, as I stood there, the Minister for Industry and Science took to the microphone and spoke of his support for ARENA, for their researchers and their projects, but what he did not say was that it is this government's policy to shut ARENA down and to take funding away from it. Everyone in the room knew that, as soon as the minister left the room, he would get back to work on trying to close down these important and incredible projects—to act as though there had been no technological advancements in the field of energy production since the combustion engine in the 18th century. Instead, we have this incredible brainpower and innovation happening right here, in this country, that needs support and that needs innovation. But it is not getting it, and the people in that room and the scientists and researchers knew that this government's proposal was to shut down organisations like ARENA. Last night I met a woman who told me her husband was working as a renewable energy researcher and that they were about to move to the UK because they could no longer be guaranteed secure funding here in Australia.

These tales are being told right across the country. In my electorate I have met with PhD student Jess, who came up here to parliament. She wants to stay working in her field, but she feels that she needs to step away from research if she wants to stay in Melbourne and to have any sort of job security that will enable her and her partner to take on a mortgage. I met with George, who was very recently forced to hang up his lab coat and move into the business world after a very successful 12 years in the School of Chemistry at the University of Melbourne because of the limited opportunities in science and research in this country.

At the moment, scientists and researchers feel that the funding for science and research is just living from budget cycle to budget cycle and that, every time governments get into trouble, every time they feel they need to balance the budget, they treat science and research as a honey pot to dip into. As a result of that uncertainty, we are witnessing a brain drain. People are saying, 'We will go overseas to other places where they secure funding for science and research and where young researchers know that they can have a long career.'

Sadly, under this government we have the percentage of spending on science and research at its lowest levels since we started keeping records. We are at a 30-year low on spending on research and development in this country. We need to boost it up to at least three per cent, which is where many of our trading partners are, and hopefully up to four or five as some other countries have.

There are some green shoots in this country. Already over 20,000 people have signed up at respectresearch.com.au for the Respect Research campaign. They are putting up stickers like this one here all over

their workplaces around the country because people know that Australia's future depends on science, research and innovation, and that means governments from across the political spectrum need to stop chopping and changing science funding and instead commit to securing it for the long term and lifting it to at least the levels that our trading partners have.