



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Child Care

SPEECH

Tuesday, 19 November 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:06): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance from my background as a union organiser looking after limited hours day-care centres and also as a parent with two kids who went through child care and with one still there three days a week and also living across the road from a childcare centre. I could focus on that horrific road accident called ABC Learning that happened under the watch of those opposite, but instead I will briefly go to Labor's record before moving on to the real issues that have been touched on tangentially by those opposite but in no great detail. Let us look at some facts: record funding under Labor for early childhood education and care; an increase to the childcare rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent; improved affordability of care, resulting in a 30 per cent increase in the number of children in care—now over one million. I know occasional care has been an issue, but those opposite forgot to mention the fact that there has been a 30 per cent increase. Back in 2004 under the Liberals out-of-pocket expenses were 30 per cent of your disposable income. Under Labor in 2012, it was down to 8.4 per cent. Most importantly, we delivered that \$300-million boost to wages.

As touched on by the member for Bendigo in her speech, the horrific fact is 180 educators per week are leaving this sector. Anyone that has kids in care, and this was touched on by the member of the Corangamite, trusts their children will be looked after by these educators. We know it is not a childcare service. Children are our most precious burden. Children are hope distilled. So to hand them over to strangers, you need to rely on a quality framework to make sure that educators are trained up and that there are checks and balances. Then you need to make sure that they will be there in the long haul because, as anyone knows, if your child is in care and—be they 15 months, three years or four years—changes educators, it can be quite traumatic. All of a sudden when you drop them off it is a much more traumatic event because they are not given a warm, helping, familiar hand; instead it is the hand of a stranger. What is the best thing we can do for childcare? We can invest in quality training and remuneration.

I heard horrific stories during the Big Steps campaign organised by the United Voice union such as the reality of people having to take another job on the weekend just to be able to consider the possibility of getting a housing loan. People were working five days a week, ridiculous hours. I work across a road from a childcare centre. I know that they are there from six to six. I know that horrific rush, as a member of parliament, of trying to get there before six o'clock. But, I tell you what, I would not begrudge paying the extra dollar if it went into the pockets of a childcare worker. I know the member opposite talked about the inconvenience of being there after six. Think what it is like to have a job where you cannot afford to get a loan to buy a house, where you have to get a second job when you are a professional educator with quality standards, where you have to pay for your own professional development and you cannot be considered for a loan and so are consigned to a lifetime of being a renter. Imagine that. That is the Walmart theory of labour. That is not the Labor Party's vision of labour in Australia. It has not been the vision of capital in Australia's approach to labour since the Harvester decision back in the early 1900s.

Surely the people that look after our most valuable commodity, our future, our children, those people that are designing our planet for the future are worthy of some extra remuneration. Surely those opposite that have backgrounds in childcare centres, either taking profit from owning them or from having kids working in them or from having spouses that own them, would understand that we should wherever possible invest in remuneration. That is the best use of government dollars when it comes to the childcare sector.

Those opposite are waving around and trumpeting this review like Chamberlain getting off an aeroplane. I know what 'review' means if you have not committed to any more money for child care. If you are going to throw money to nannies, au pairs and the like, that is fine but it has to be new money. Do not steal from those that are already suffering in this sector. (*Time expired*)