



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2013-2014

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Tuesday, 4 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Tuesday, 4 June 2013
Page 5211
Questioner
Speaker Ley, Sussan, MP

Source House
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Ms LEY (Farrer) (16:08 I welcome the opportunity to address some questions to the minister for early childhood, who has just been on his feet. These questions specifically concern the \$300 million commitment to additional wages for those working in the childcare sector, the Early Years Quality Fund and the associated pay unit within the Fair Work Commission.

I appreciate that the minister and his department are not responsible for the information that is on the Big Steps website; nevertheless, given the amount of innuendo, rumour and misinformation that is circulating amongst a sector that contains very vulnerable workers, I would like the minister to take this opportunity to respond to some of the statements and information that is provided by the Big Steps campaign, which was initiated by the union United Voice.

In particular, I would like the minister to comment on answer b of question 4 of the frequently asked questions on the Big Steps website. It mentions that, in order for a centre to receive funding, it may show that in the membership of its workforce there are members of United Voice, and that is 'because United Voice is an organisation that has campaigned for and supported the national quality framework'. While we know that United Voice has campaigned for and supported wages and a deal that has been done with the Prime Minister, would the minister agree that United Voice is actually responsible for the national quality framework?

Minister, that is really a side issue. The question I ask on that answer is whether membership of United Voice is a requirement for a centre to receive payments under the Early Years Quality Fund, given that anecdotally I have received many reports of unions entering into workplaces, childcare centres and long-day care centres, and insisting to the educators on the floor (1) that they have a meeting and (2) that 60 per cent of them join the union in order for that centre to be eligible for increased funding. I would like the minister to take this opportunity to completely answer: is that or is that not the case?

The other aspect that I would like the minister to address—and it is closely related—is that the Big Steps website and the union United Voice have put out and widely circulated a table of wage increases that will relate to all those who would be successful in receiving funding. Is the minister able to tell us whether that wages schedule is in fact correct? I will just pick one example—it is the one that is most often used—which is that the first increment of a certificate III would receive \$3 an hour. Is that what the wage increase would be if a centre were successful?

The third area that I would like the minister to address—again closely related—is the proportion of the workforce that will receive the increased pay. We appreciate that the bill is before the House and has been referred to House and Senate committees. The Big Steps website says that 40 per cent of the workforce will receive this funding and that if you are an educator you therefore have a 40 per cent chance of being able to receive this funding. Does the minister agree with the 40 per cent figure? Other estimates are much lower. I would like to know what proportion of the workforce the minister believes may be eligible for this funding.

So, Minister, if I can just briefly sum up before we hear an answer, those things are, working backwards: what proportion of the workforce do you believe would be able to receive the funding? To what degree does membership of the union United Voice in that workplace influence the ability of those workers to receive the funding? Is the pay schedule that is being widely circulated correct? I probably have enough in that for you to give us a detailed response, thank you.