



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WELFARE TO WORK AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES) BILL 2006

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 27 February 2007

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 27 February 2007
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Questioner
Speaker Brandis, Sen George

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Minister for the Arts and Sport) (4.45 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

Employment Security Bill 1998

The Bill contains a number of amendments to the Disability Services Act 1986 to support the staged introduction of contestability for vocational rehabilitation services. The Bill also makes a number of minor and technical amendments to the Social Security Act 1991 and the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 to ensure there is integrity in the application of the law and to ensure that the Welfare to Work measures which commenced on 1 July 2006 continue to be fairly and consistently applied.

CRS Australia is currently the sole provider of Australian Government-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Services. To enable people with disability or injuries to have greater choice of rehabilitation providers to assist them to re-enter the workforce, the Government is introducing contestability in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. The first stage introduces partial contestability for the two year period from 1 July 2007.

The Welfare to Work changes commenced on 1 July 2006. They are the most significant changes to the Australian social security system since the middle of the twentieth century. The smooth implementation across policy agencies and service providers is a commendable achievement. While it is still early days since implementation, the most recent labour force data indicate extremely encouraging trends towards the reforms key goals: increased workforce participation and strong employment rates.

The amendments will enhance the smooth operation of the legislation so that job seekers among the targeted disadvantage groups of the Welfare to Work reforms —long term unemployed people, parents of school age children, mature age Australians and people with disabilities —can continue to be supported and assisted to build their capacity and find work through employment and related services.

There are minimal financial implications for the measures contained in this Bill.

Debate (on motion by **Senator Brandis**) adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.