



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

**HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (STUDENT
SERVICES AND AMENITIES, AND
OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009**

In Committee

SPEECH

Monday, 17 August 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Nash, Sen Fiona

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Senator NASH (New South Wales) (9.14 pm)—I rise to make a few remarks in support of my colleagues Senator Joyce and Senator Williams. This whole exercise takes me back to when, quite some time ago now, I attended Mitchell College, as it was then, in Bathurst. I attended that college for the whole experience, not just to get a piece of paper at the end of it that said I had been sitting in front of a computer, pretty well, for the last three years and now I had a degree. Attending university is very much about the whole experience. There has been some commentary about user pays programs and questions like, ‘What about all those students who do not actually use the sporting facilities?’ To an extent, that may be valid, and there may be just a small number of footballers running out onto the paddock or netballers running out onto the court, but from my memory—and I do not think it has changed—there were swarms of people watching those games and swarms of people celebrating with those teams afterwards in a social environment. So it is not just about the users of those sporting facilities; it is about the entire social environment, interaction and experience that that creates for those attending university.

And it is about balance. I have two teenage boys that one day may well decide to head off to university. It is not just about making sure that they get a piece of paper with some qualifications on it; it is about making sure that they have every opportunity to access the broadest experience possible. They are only two children, but I think that principle applies to all students who are attending university. It is not just about that piece of paper.

I particularly commend our Young Nationals in New South Wales, who have been very strongly supporting, for some time now, an amenities fee. They know it is about fairness and equity, particularly for regional universities and regional students. We know, when we look at the big metropolitan universities, that they have the economy of scale, they have got the capacity to provide services over and above those educational services that students need. We want them to grow up into fully-fledged, developed adults that have a broad view of the world. As my colleague Senator Joyce pointed out earlier, sport is one of the ways to ensure that. It is not just about scoring points and winning the game but about the interaction that that provides on the way through, and it is our regional universities who are least able to provide those facilities under the current arrangements. There is no doubt there is this tyranny of region aspect, where they simply have not got the economies of scale to provide the same services that are provided in metropolitan areas.

We need to make sure that our regional universities can provide the best possible opportunities for students and can attract students in every possible way. One of the main reasons for that is that, when we are looking at ensuring that we have sustainable regional communities, students who go through regional universities are seven times more likely to stay in those regional communities. So it is not just about an amenities fee for universities for playing fields. It is much bigger, much broader, than that—it is about providing universities that students want to attend, where they get every opportunity to strive and attain every possible achievement while they are there.

This is not a perfect amenities fee. There are probably some other areas that deserve consideration. But, for the purposes of this, if we have this amendment on the sporting facilities, this will free up a whole lot of funding for those universities to put into other areas that absolutely need funding, because this is such a significant cost to those universities. I am very pleased to be part of this amendment that has been moved by Senators Joyce and Williams and by me. It is about equity and it is about fairness.