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CORRECTIONS

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Facsimile:	Senate	(02) 6277 2977
	House of Representatives	(02) 6277 2944
	Main Committee	(02) 6277 2944

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

package. They actually have a lot in common. The package is targeted and temporary, and so is the Leader of the Opposition.

This morning, the opportunism of the opposition has had further light cast on it. This morning we had a new low when it comes to the members opposite. Today, we heard from one of the shadow leaders of the opposition—in fact, the preferred leader of the opposition. Today, we heard from Banquo's ghost: our old friend, the member for Higgins. He spoke to the ABC and he spoke of opportunity. He did not speak about Australia being a land of opportunity. He did not talk about the opportunities for Australia as one of the countries that has withstood the global recession better than any other. He did not talk about opportunities for young Australians. He spoke about political opportunity. The member for Higgins has recently been begged by many members opposite to return to the leadership. This is what the member for Higgins said this morning:

Actually, the political times probably suit an opposition because since the election more Australians have lost their jobs. Australians have watched their superannuation go backwards. The value of your average Australian asset—that is, their shares and their houses—has gone down, and it is undeniably the case that since 2007, on average, every Australian has gone backwards, which I would have thought is very fertile ground for an opposition.

Indeed, it gets worse. He went on to say:

So I say there is an opportunity there and the question is to realise it.

Have you ever seen more crass political opportunism from a member of this House than from the alternative leader of the opposition, the member for Higgins? The Australian people are looking for more from a political party than opportunism. They are looking for more than an opposition that say, 'The times will suit us.' They are looking for a political party that provides leadership to get through a crisis and provides decisive action, not political opportunism, which the member for Wentworth and the member for Higgins have made an art form of.

Higher Education

Mr TURNBULL (3.29 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education. I refer the minister to the thousands of Australian students currently undertaking a gap year in a bid to achieve the independent rate of youth allowance, some of whom have come to the parliament today from their homes in rural and regional New South Wales and Victoria and have met with each of us and explained the real problems they are facing as a result of the government's changes. Given these students have made their study and life choices based on the advice of career advisers at their school and Centrelink staff and other government information, does the minister believe it is fair to change the rules on them halfway through their gap year?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. At Senator Fielding's invitation, I did meet earlier today with a number of young people who came to parliament from Shepparton and Warrnambool, in particular. They were actually sitting at the front of the gallery just over there until an earlier point in question time. I did have a good discussion with them about student financing and about aspirations for young people to go to university and we talked through some of their concerns. The Leader of the Opposition, having had a comparable discussion with them, would be aware of some of their concerns about the student financing package.

What we talked through in the meeting I had with them was that current student financing arrangements are flawed, and there was a general consensus about that. They, like me, were concerned by the evidence that there are higher income Australians with students living at home who have qualified for the full rate of student allowance, and the findings of the Bradley review are very, very clear on this. That is a concern, and they shared that concern. I think they shared that concern because, like me and the government, they want to see dollars spent on student financing going to make the best possible difference.

Our student financing package has been drawn up with those principles in mind. We believe that money should go to low- and middle-income families. The current means test is too low. It means that many lower- and middle-income families miss out. The received message has therefore been that the only way you can get student allowance is to defer for a year and to seek to qualify as independent. The great vice of that, of course, is that many people who do defer for a year actually do not ever come back into education. And we discussed that at our meeting today. We also discussed at our meeting the new scholarship arrangements, with gaps on scholarships under the current system—

Ms Marino—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The gap year students want to know how they will be affected by this and what the government will do for them.

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I am talking precisely to that question and the features of the new arrangement. We talked about how the features of the new arrangement include all students who qualify for youth allowance getting access to a start-up scholarship and a relocation scholarship, where those things are capped now and there are students who miss out. And we talked about the ability under the new arrangements for students to earn more through part-time work when they are at university before student financing gets withdrawn.

We had a comprehensive discussion. I was pleased to have it. I will certainly be meeting with other young people to discuss these issues. I maintain my view that there is much misinformation and misrepresentation about the package. We want to keep talking it through with people. I was very pleased to meet with the young people today. It was in fact a great discussion. I conclude by suggesting that, in the course of the discussion today, I met a young woman who in her future I suspect may well be the next Laurie Oakes. She was very good at the questions.

Education

Mr ZAPPIA (3.34 pm)—My question is also to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on new research and approaches to quality teaching?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Makin for his question. As a South Australian, I thank him for his interest in the fact that a fellow South Australian, namely my father, celebrated his 80th birthday on Saturday. Happy birthday, Dad. But I have actually been asked about performance pay and better quality in teaching. On the weekend, as well as celebrating my father's birthday, I did release a report, commissioned by the former government, called *Rewarding quality teaching*. Like all things associated with education and the Liberal Party, this is testament once again to a track record of failure.

As a result of the question from the Leader of the Opposition, we have just had the opportunity to talk about their failure in student financing and their inability to get dollars to students who needed it the most—a situation which, of course, led to rural and regional participation rates at university declining under a government that included the National Party. This report is another testament to the failure of the Liberal Party on education. Commissioned by the previous government, the report about performance pay for teachers found no support amongst stakeholders for the previous Liberal government's suggestion that teacher pay and student scores should be put together—one of the dumbest ideas ever floated in Australian politics, which would have been a recipe from the Liberal Party to make sure that every teacher in the most well-to-do schools in this country got a pay rise while every teacher in the most disadvantaged schools in this country got a pay cut.

When it comes to talking about education, what we know about the Liberal Party is that in government they used to talk and do nothing; in opposition, they do not bother to talk about education and they do not do anything. In government, they used to float ideas and not follow through; in opposition, they do not even bother floating ideas. We know that a former minister for education, David Kemp, said in 1996:

The Federal Government will this month begin a national review of the university education of teachers ... It will recommend new national standards and guidelines for pre-service teacher degrees by April, 1997.

You guessed it, Mr Speaker—nothing happened. The last minister for education under the Liberal government, the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition, said in February 2007:

We need a teacher training and registration process that is nationally consistent, not only for the benefit of the current teaching workforce, but also to make it easier for potential teachers to enter the profession ...

You guessed it—nothing happened. They were all talk in government and no action, with nothing that made a real difference to the circumstances of Australian children.

That stands in stark contrast to the actions of the Rudd government to improve teacher quality. We have entered a \$550 million national partnership to do just that. It is already bringing changes to our education system. In New South Wales the funding is being used to create a new category of highly accomplished teachers who will earn around \$100,000 a year if they go and teach in the most disadvantaged schools in New South Wales. This is a reform long dreamed of being delivered by the Rudd Labor government. Having pressed this reform through our national partnership and seeing it being delivered in New South Wales, we will be pressing this reform around the nation, because great teachers deserve better pay and kids that need the most benefit from education deserve to have great teachers.

We are also funding the Teach for Australia project—an initiative that will bring high-performing graduates into the most disadvantaged schools. Once again, this is a long-dreamed-of and long-talked-about initiative that would bring highly capable young people into disadvantaged schools to share their passion for teaching and their passion for change to see disadvantaged students succeed. This is an initiative on which we have taken action, and it will deliver.

In government, we are delivering an education revolution. We are doing it because we need to overcome the track record of neglect of the Liberal government. We are doing it because we want every Australian child to get a great, quality education. What do we see from the Liberal Party? Absolutely nothing. The shadow minister has published one speech on his website this year. That is it. He has nothing more to say about education—no ideas, no debate and no consideration about the nation's future.

Child Care

Mrs MIRABELLA (3.40 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth. I refer the minister to her remarks in the press that families will have to share in the burden of