



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Forrest Electorate: Budget**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 19 August 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Wednesday, 19 August 2009	<b>Source</b> House
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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Marino, Nola, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Ms MARINO** (Forrest) (9.42 am)—I rise to call on the government and the Minister for Education, Minister Gillard, to stop ignoring the plight of current gap year students and their families caused by the government's proposed changes to Youth Allowance. The stress and uncertainty for these families created by this minister and this Labor government is totally, totally unacceptable—not only for the people in my electorate, but all those in regional and rural areas right around Australia. As all of us know—except, it appears, the minister, despite our repeated representations—the current gap year students will not qualify for Youth Allowance under the government's proposed changes.

So, Minister, what do these parents and students do now? How will they be able to go on to university when the only way they could afford to do so was through the financial assistance of Youth Allowance? It is absolutely appalling and, unfortunately, patently obvious that the Minister for Education simply does not care at all about the stress and pressure her decision has placed on students and their families in regional and rural areas. Just as obviously, to this Labor government and to this minister current gap year students are merely collateral damage in this change and the educational aspirations of those current gap year students are totally dispensable.

Where is the detailed analysis on the number of current gap year students in my electorate who will be disadvantaged? How many students in my electorate, who would previously have qualified for Youth Allowance, will now not meet the eligibility criteria? How will they now be able to afford to go to university? Is the government simply expecting the parents to work even harder and longer to try to afford the additional costs of offering their child their educational opportunity? Do these students have to go back to square one, start their gap year process again and push back their study for a further 18 months to two years? This supposes, of course, that the university will retain their place.

Where in my electorate will these currently disqualified gap year students find 30 hours of work every week for 18 months in small regional towns and rural communities? Where is the acknowledgement of the students' need to travel to find such work, even if it is available? There is no equity of opportunity for higher education for regional students in the proposed changes, or the acknowledgment that every student from my electorate who has to relocate to study faces substantially higher costs to access their education than a student who lives at home and does not have to travel. Students from my electorate live at least two to four hours drive from metropolitan universities and have no choice but to relocate to Perth. There are a multitude of additional costs associated with relocation, such as accommodation, transport, food and communication with home, just to mention a few. One of the parents said to me that she is very concerned her children will not be able to go on to university; they cannot afford to do so. I call on the government and Minister Gillard to stop ignoring the plight of current gap year students and their families on the effects of the government's proposed changes. I also call on the minister to stop discriminating against regional students. (*Time expired*)