



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Higher Education

SPEECH

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 24 February 2010 Page 60 Questioner Speaker Marino, Nola, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Ms MARINO (Forrest) (4.49 pm)—I am very pleased to speak on this matter of public importance, because I am one of those regional members who has repeatedly made representations to the minister directly and here in this House on behalf of students in my electorate. One question the minister and the other members who have spoken here today has failed to answer is: where will students who have to use that 30 hours of work a week to qualify for youth allowance actually get a job? That is a really core issue for those of us who represent rural and regional students. Those families are saying to us that that is the very issue. It is the very issue behind most of the phone calls and emails: where will students who need to qualify for youth allowance using the 30 hours of work a week provision actually be able to find a job?

Dr Kelly—It is 30 hours on average.

Ms MARINO—Even so, where do young people find 30 hours of work a week, average, in my electorate? There are small towns in my electorate. Where do young people in Brunswick, Pemberton, Donnybrook or Harvey find an average of 30 hours of work a week in an 18-month period? That is the question that has not been answered. That is the question that people in my electorate want answered, because for them that is often the only pathway to qualify for youth allowance. It is often the only way so many young people have qualified previously. They are very seriously concerned about this, and I am very genuine in standing up here representing the issues that affect my rural and regional students and their families. This is a very important issue.

I notice that it took a lot of representation. We have seen that the Country Education Foundation and the Isolated Children's Parents Association have been very concerned about the government's changes. They are all well aware of them because, like me, they actually live in a rural or regional area and they know that you cannot find 30 hours of work a week, average, in 18 months. They know that, like I do, because that is where we live and work. As has been said in this House, we on this side of the parliament actually represent the majority of regional areas and students in those areas, so we certainly know.

One of the things the Minister for Education said was that parents who have two children at university and who are earning \$140,000 will qualify for youth

allowance. I understand that the member for Riverina—and I have a piece of paper provided by the member for Riverina—has checked that on the website calculator and that it would actually amount to \$2.80 per fortnight per child.

I look at the retrospectivity in this bill and I look at those young people who last year did a gap year. They took advice from their school careers advisers and they took advice from Centrelink and they did the 12 months of gap year on the understanding that they would be able to qualify for youth allowance. Now we know that only 5,000 of those, under the changes that the government has proposed, will actually be able to claim youth allowance, while there are at least 25,000 young people who will not—25,000 young people who completed that gap year in the full belief that they would qualify for youth allowance. They are from the same families who are saying to us, 'Our children cannot afford to go on to university.'

So it is very important that people, like me and others, who have made representations on this issue do so, because we have to represent the issues that concern those young people. We have offered to split this bill. We have offered to pass the Commonwealth Scholarships and we will continue to stand up for rural and regional students in this parliament.