



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Youth Allowance

SPEECH

Thursday, 4 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 4 June 2009 Page 5847 Questioner Speaker Marino, Nola, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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Ms MARINO (Forrest) (12.51 pm)—I rise once again to raise the issue of the Labor government's budget decision to change the youth allowance and the disproportionate impact this will have on regional students, particularly the students in my electorate in the south-west of Western Australia. My office has been inundated with calls and emails from desperate and worried students and their parents. I continue to receive these on a daily basis. The changes of the Minister for Education, due to take effect in January 2010, seriously discriminate against regional students currently in their gap year who have no alternative but to move to a capital city like Perth for their tertiary education. I meet these great young people all the time. They are motivated, with great careers ahead of them, and are working part time to help fund their own education. These are students who have taken a year off from starting their university study to work to qualify for the independent youth allowance and who are currently in the process of earning the required \$19,000 under the existing rules. In most instances, both their own plans for study and their family's plans are seriously compromised.

These students will now have to work virtually full time for two years before they qualify for youth allowance. In some instances, this will deny some of my south-west students a university education. For many of my students, it is the youth allowance that is the difference between being able to study at a university in Perth and not being able to study at university at all to achieve their career goals.

The Commonwealth accommodation scholarships of \$4,500 each year assisted students to meet just some of the significant additional costs of living away from home. The substituted relocation allowance of \$4,000 for the first year and \$1,000 for the subsequent three years ignores the ongoing additional costs of living away from home. Students in my electorate have no choice but to live away from home. The majority of courses are available only at universities in Perth. Perth is anything from a 2½- to four-hour drive each way for those students. They do not have the option of a daily bus fare from a metropolitan suburb to university like their city counterparts do.

I know from correspondence that the students and parents in my electorate were equally as disappointed as I was when the Minister for Education, answering a question in the House of Representatives on this issue, either did not understand what this change actually meant to regional gap year students or, worse, simply did not care what her Labor government did to my regional and rural students. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding and concern was clearly evident in the minister's dismissive response, which, I must say, had a devastating impact on both the parents and the students.

From January 2010, to qualify for youth allowance, students have to work for 18 months for 30 hours a week—that is, two-thirds of a full-time job. How many regional students will be able to access a university education when one year is the majority university deferral period and very few courses offer a midyear intake? And how many 30-hour a week jobs are there in small regional towns and rural areas for school leavers? What we will see is fewer regional students attending university and, for those who are able to do so, a far greater sacrifice needed from those students and their families compared to metropolitan students and families. One of the letters I received, from Jeff Heath, said:

My eldest daughter is currently doing a gap year before she starts university. She can only do the course ... in Perth to become a secondary Maths teacher. We live in Donnybrook ... so we have already found her accommodation ... at a cost of \$12,500 plus. We were relying on her being able to qualify for Youth Allowance after working for this year and earning the required \$19,000 ... As she has already deferred for one year it is impossible for her to defer for another year to qualify under the ... new rules ...

To compound our dilemma our second daughter is in her final year at Bunbury Catholic College and was also planning on taking a gap year to qualify ...

I believe these proposed changes have not taken into consideration the financial hardship it is for country parents to send —

[their] children to Uni away from home.

I have a whole file full of these emails. One parent asked me whether the government is further discriminating against those who will go on to become future doctors, lawyers and vets by lowering the age from 25 to 22 years. Where is the equity of opportunity in tertiary education for students from Forrest? This is a clear example of how young people in my electorate are already paying for the Labor government's reckless spending—funding sources that could have been used to retain support for regional students.