



**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
THE HON. MALCOLM TURNBULL MP
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WENTWORTH**

6 July 2009

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. MALCOLM TURNBULL MP
AND MS NOLA MARINO MP
INTERVIEW WITH GLYNN GREENSMITH
ABC SOUTH WEST WA**

Subjects: Labor's proposed changes to Youth Allowance; Coalition's push to ensure that rural and regional students are not disadvantaged.

E&OE.....

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

The Leader of the Federal Opposition Party, Mr Malcolm Turnbull and the Member for Forrest, Nola Marino are in the studio with me this morning. Good morning.

NOLA MARINO:

Good morning.

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Great to be with you

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

It's very nice to have you here. Youth Allowance has been a hot topic in regional Australia over recent weeks. Nola, you've had a few chats about this including on this program and for people who haven't been listening to that, remind us what the problem is.

NOLA MARINO:

Well, the proposed changes that we saw in the Budget basically mean that existing students in a gap year will be disaffected by this change because it comes into effect in January 2010. So that's a real issue for the current gap year students. The other issue that appears to be concerning parents quite significantly is the requirement to work for the 30 hours a week, each week for at least 18 months of any two year period ahead. For students and parents in small communities, this is a very big issue. The other change as well to the Commonwealth scholarships is an issue. Certainly, previously any student could apply for this. From here on, only those that actually are eligible for Youth Allowance will be able to apply. So when that applied

across the South West, it really has caused just so much concern as you would understand Glynn and my office has really be inundated with calls, emails, contacts of all sorts about this issue.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Malcolm, you're heading to a school. You're going to hear from students themselves right after this interview. What are you expecting to be told this morning?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Well, what we'll be hearing are concerns about the way in which Labor's changes to Youth Allowance is prejudicing, undermining the educational opportunities of students in rural and regional Australia and of course here in the South West. These changes have been very poorly thought through and they are going to disadvantage many students in this part of Australia and right around rural and regional Australia so we'll be listening to the case studies, if you like, the specific examples of the situations people find themselves in. We've already proposed some changes to Labor's proposal which would firstly ensure that the students Nola just spoke about who are doing a gap year at the moment and who've relied on the existing arrangements and taken them as a given and based their life's plan around that, we would move the start date for the new arrangements through to 2011 so that there'll be no effective retrospectivity. That's an important change. And we're also proposing to set up a new rural and regional scholarship program which would provide more support for students from rural and regional Australia who of course don't have, very often or very rarely have the luxury that students in the cities have of being able to go to uni and live at home with mum and dad.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

A scholarship program points to just a few people though. What wide ranging measures can be put in place and is it just getting too hard and too expensive for the Government to try and help regional students go to university now?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

I don't believe it is at all. I don't think there is anything more important than ensuring that there is equitable access to education at every level and it is completely unacceptable that in Australia a student should be disadvantaged in terms of his or her access to tertiary education because they live in rural or regional Australia. I mean, why should a child living in Bunbury or Busselton be at a disadvantage to one living in Perth?

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Eight past ten, just coming up to nine past ten on the morning program. The Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull and the Member for Forrest, Nola Marino are my guests. They won't be here long. They have much to do so don't miss your opportunity if you have comments or questions on this and many of you have had over the past month or so in which we've been discussing Youth Allowance. 1300 545 222 is the phone number. 19922604 to send a text. A Senate inquiry will be held. Now that was due to a bit of [inaudible] support from the Greens and the Coalition as well...

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Yep, that's right.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

...which shows that there's quite a lot of opposition across the board on this. What can the Senate inquiry do?

NOLA MARINO:

Well, essentially what I'm going to ask for it to do is to come to the South West. I want it to come here and hear first hand from the families and the students themselves so I'll be pushing for that one. But the Senate inquiry should really investigate and be able to draw out all of these issues that we're talking about and hear first hand from the case studies, as Malcolm said, as to what this is actually going to mean in practical terms for students and families in regional and rural areas.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Malcolm, let's return to the bigger picture of education funding and higher education funding. Obviously we're looking at an ageing population and social security is going to be such a drain on resources. Is it just a reality of life that people are going to have to start funding themselves and we're going to be looking at a situation where rich kids get to go to university and poor kids don't?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Well that is not acceptable. Plainly, what we need to do is to ensure that all Australians have equal access to education and it is unacceptable, all sides of politics should agree it being unacceptable for children in rural and regional areas to be at a disadvantage and that's why... obviously, it is you know if you live down the road from the university and you can live at home with mum and dad or you can get the bus or walk there or the train. Clearly, that's an advantage you've got. But you shouldn't be in a position where because somebody lives in rural Australia or regional Australia that they do not get, for practical terms, they do not get access to tertiary education. That is unacceptable and so what the Senate committee is going to do is to look into the detail of this, examine this very carefully, have hearings around Australia, come to the South West. We've certainly encouraged the Committee to do that.

NOLA MARINO:

We're pushing.

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

We'll certainly be encouraging the Senators to do that – come to the South West, go right around Australia, find out the facts and then be able to suggest amendments to the legislation which will ensure that there is no prejudice to students in rural and regional Australia.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

A lot of people around the South West now looking at their bank balance, looking at their children, thinking which one of you do I get to educate, which one can I afford. Be realistic for us; explain to us a little bit about how federal politics works. If they're looking at their bank balance and they're saying, okay, you know, the Opposition, the Greens have got together; this inquiry has been formed. Is it going to make a difference? In real terms, are they still going to have to start budgeting?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Well I think every family has to budget, we know that. But nonetheless, we don't, we cannot be in the situation where a child is disadvantaged in terms of his or her access to education, to university, tertiary education in this case, simply because they live outside of a big city. That is unacceptable and so we have to ensure there is equitable access and that is our big concern about these changes. Obviously, there are two big concerns here. I mean, this is a complex set of changes. There are two big concerns. Firstly, there is a cohort of students – about 35,000 students – who in good faith, acting on the advice of their teachers, their career guidance counsellors and so forth have made a decision to undertake a gap year on the existing rules and if Labor's changes go through, they will be massively disadvantaged. In other words, the rug will be pulled out from under their feet. That's one group. Now we can solve that by moving the start date forward by a year to 2011.

The second big area of concern is its impact on students in rural and regional Australia that do not qualify for Youth Allowance, perhaps because there's a farm or a small business which is not, as is often the case, not generating a lot of cash flow but nonetheless has an asset value that's over the assets test. They can't get the Youth Allowance. The only way they can get that is by working and the increased work requirements are such that make it very hard practically for them to comply with it. So that is the key thing. It is equity, equitable access to education. That's what we're seeking to achieve. These Labor changes, as we've seen from the up swelling of protest from the community, are not going to do that. They're going to undermine equitable access to education and that's what we've got to seek to set right through the Senate.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Nola.

NOLA MARINO:

Glynn, I was just going to just add in there I think today what Malcolm will hear from the parents and students is that I have parents who've emailed me, rung me. They've said we're in the position where we actually have to choose which one of our children may be able to attend university because their course is in Perth. Now that is really a major concern for me and even for those young people, their educational opportunities but also what they bring back, the qualities they bring back to the South West when they come back. So that's a real, it's a major issue.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Some very concerned parents out there. Steven Busselton is one of them. Hi Steve. You have a teenager?

CALLER:

Yeah, g'day Glynn. How you going?

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Very well.

CALLER:

We've got our young bloke finished Year 12 last year. He's going through the gap year and will start university next year, so we fit in I guess the gang of 35,000 people. I think there's an element of unnecessary fear going on here. We got all the emails when they started circulating six or seven weeks ago, went to Centrelink, enquired about our specific situation, and worked out that he will be eligible. We've got a

reference number out of Centrelink, and I know the name of the person I've spoken to so I think there's an element of... There are certainly some people who will be strongly disadvantaged – they need to be considered, but it's not all, not everyone will be disadvantaged so people need, there needs to be an element of education as well as fear going on.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Steve, thanks very much for the call.

CALLER:

Thank you.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Quarter past ten here on the morning program. Julia Gillard called opposition to Youth Allowance a scare campaign issue, right?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Well, I'm sure she did but the fact of the matter is there are a lot of people who recognise that the rules are being changed and that they will be disadvantaged. Now, we've just heard from Steve from Busselton and if that's the case, if his advice is right, I'm delighted that his young lad is not being prejudiced but there are a lot of others that are, and so it's important to ensure that their position is protected and they're not treated unfairly.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Nola.

NOLA MARINO:

I was just going to add that we've encouraged people to look at the proposed criteria from each individual circumstance and get back to us on the issues that are of most concern to them, and the points that I'm raising here are those that people have come back to us after looking through a range of the criteria that's been proposed.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

You've got to get off to meet these kids and these parents. We'll let you go in just a second.

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Glynn, yeah, can I just make one final point in terms of what Julia Gillard said about there being a fear campaign?

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Yes.

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

The protests about the impact of these Youth Allowance changes have been spontaneous and they've been right around Australia. There've been huge public meetings held in rural and regional Australia, in every State, right around the country. So this is not a question of a fear campaign or anything of the sort. There is very legitimate concerns out there, and it's Nola and my job as Members of Parliament, as Members of the Opposition, to hold the Government to account and do whatever we can to ensure that people are not disadvantaged.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

It's great to have you in the region, great to talk policy. I know it's not something you're getting to talk a lot of at the moment. There are a lot of activists and passionate Liberal Party supporters in this region who work very hard for the Party. They will be asking the question today, as everybody with a microphone will be – are you going to be the Leader of the Liberal party in six months time?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Yeah, absolutely.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

No Tonys on the horizon?

MALCOLM TURNBULL:

Not at all.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Thank you so much for your time. Malcolm Turnbull, Leader of the Opposition, Nola Marino, the Member for Forrest.

NOLA MARINO:

Thank you.

GLYNN GREENSMITH:

Thanks so much.

[ends]