

25 November 2009

Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2]

Second Reading

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.10 pm) — I rise in support of the [Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment \(Income Support for Students\) Bill 2009 \[No. 2\]](#). I wish to begin by making a few observations in relation to the speech given by the member for Riverina. I certainly do not doubt the member for Riverina's passion in trying to represent the interests of residents in her electorate, but even with the particular example that she brought forward we see an incorrect statement—an incorrect assumption of fact. That incorrect assumption of fact was the cut-out for the youth allowance. The figure of \$32,000 was used. In the same way as I recognise the great work that members in this place do in communicating with their electorate, in the way that the member for Riverina has suggested, I would hope that the member for Riverina would take seriously her obligation to ensure that her constituents are properly informed about the matters that are being debated in this place. If she took that obligation seriously, which I am sure she would not fail to do deliberately, then she would point out to her constituent that, as a consequence of the changes proposed in this bill, that threshold will be increased. The significance of that is not lost on me in a community where there are many families who will benefit greatly from these measures. I represent an electorate where the median household income is \$62,000. There is no doubt in my mind that there are many families in my electorate who will be positively affected by these changes.

What we are seeing here is a measure, along with a whole raft of other measures, that actually provides people with opportunities to get a tertiary education and relieves some of the financial burden of tertiary study. No-one is choosing to defend the regime that those opposite left us—the legacy. I think it was the President of the NUS who called it an 'iniquitous legacy'—I think those were his words. They choose to not defend that, but they also choose to not put forward budget-neutral proposals. The member for Riverina says, 'Let's spend \$1 billion. Those on the other side want to quibble about a couple of dollars here and a couple of dollars there.' We are the government that are taking this country into great debt, so they tell us—the lowest net debt of any advanced economy in the world. They have a preoccupation with debt—they want to run fear and smear campaigns on debt—but, when it comes to throwing another \$1 billion at the problem, then people suggest that is the responsible course. It is not the responsible course. Those on the other side have not come forward and defended what they left behind. It was a system where there were many rorts. It was a system that meant that many working families could not access assistance as their children were often not able to avail themselves of opportunities for higher education. That is why I am standing up in support of this bill. It will positively impact on many of those constituents in my electorate.

I wonder if the member for Riverina also effectively communicated the benefits of the relocation scholarship and what that would mean for constituents within her electorate, because that will provide a benefit—

Mrs Hull interjecting—

Mr BRADBURY —Well, if they do not qualify it does not cut out at the full amount. You do not lose your youth allowance at \$40,000. It is graduated. In fact, the taper rate has been softened under these proposals, which expands access to youth allowance to a greater number of people.

There are many good reasons why this bill needs to be passed—there are the relocation scholarships, there is the fairer parental income test and there are the changes to the age test—but I will finish by making this observation: those on the other side come forward, particularly some regional and rural members, and say, 'It's terrible. Look at the state of access to education for people in rural and regional areas.' And that is a shameful legacy. But at least now they have the good sense to come forward and acknowledge this, and I think the member for Kennedy pointed that out very robustly.

My predecessor, the former member for Lindsay, once famously said that no-one in her electorate goes to university and no-one in her electorate wants to go to university. She was out of touch when she said that, but views like that no doubt inform the sort of policy that led to many people from working families being excluded—or maybe not being excluded, but having their job of going to university made even more difficult. That, in part, is why participation rates in higher education have not improved in the way in which people in the region I represent want to see. So I am very proud to support this bill and I say to those on the other side: do what students all around this country need you to do this week to ensure that they will be able to begin the university year next year on a solid footing to go on, get an education and make a great contribution to our community.