



Speech by

**Mr J. HEGARTY**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Hansard 25 August 1999

### **SCHOOL UNIFORM BILL**

**Mr HEGARTY** (Redlands—NPA) (9.49 p.m.): I rise to support the Bill, which will empower school communities to adopt a school uniform policy, if desired. This is a necessary requirement to protect school principals, who are responsible for the implementation of that policy. From listening to members opposite who have made contributions in this debate so far, I would be surprised if they can, with conscience, vote against this Bill. In the main, they have supported the principle of school uniforms being worn in State schools throughout this State.

The point is that the Ombudsman has identified a legislative requirement to enable school principals to adopt a school uniform policy and enforce the policy if that is the desire of the community. As a result, it is now necessary for us to enact legislation to give principals security.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr HEGARTY:** I am amazed that members opposite are not supporting the schools in their own communities. I am sure other honourable members are in the same position as I am. The majority of schools in my electorate have adopted a school uniform policy. Very few parents in my electorate have come to me and dissented from the enforcement of a school uniform policy which has been supported by the P & C and the principal.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! The member for Redlands will continue.

**Mr HEGARTY:** Are you going to protect me, Mr Deputy Speaker? I am not taking interjections.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! That was not a reflection on the Chair, was it?

**Mr HEGARTY:** You are hearing the interjections. You are not responding to the interjections. I am not taking the interjections.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Redlands will continue, but he will be very careful about reflecting upon the Chair.

**Mr HEGARTY:** I also ask for your support.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr HEGARTY:** A lot of stress has been laid upon concentrating on the enforcement of the wearing of uniforms at the expense of the educational needs of children in Queensland schools. Principals of schools in my electorate which do have school uniform policies—and the majority do—do not concentrate on forcing the few recalcitrants to wear uniforms. These are children who, supported by their parents, do not abide by the school's decision. The majority of school communities are happy to support the policy of school uniforms.

What we are really arguing about tonight is nothing. Those opposite say that the wearing of school uniforms should not be forced upon students. This issue is not being forced upon them. We cannot force a child to wear a uniform if the parents do not support the policy.

The benefits flowing to the vast majority of students who do wear uniforms are as follows: firstly, they are easily recognised. That point has been mentioned tonight by speakers on both sides of the

Chamber. Those of us who have attended regional or zonal sports days have been able to identify the schools—

**Mr Swarten** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing should assume that the member is not taking any interjections. I remind the member that pointing appears to be a reflection on the Chair.

**Mr HEGARTY:** Mr Deputy Speaker, this is outrageous. I am making a contribution to the debate. You keep on making accusations that I am reflecting on the Chair.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I suggest that the member for Redlands continues his speech.

**Mr HEGARTY:** As I was saying, members of the teaching staff are better able to recognise students who are wearing school uniforms. This has also been acknowledged by members on both sides of the House. We have heard about visitors coming to school premises. We have heard that teachers and ancillary staff wear appropriate name tags. This allows for easy identification of predators. Those people can then be removed from the school grounds and no harm comes to the children who are in the care of the Department of Education. That is a positive aspect. I do not believe that anyone on either side of the House would argue against that premise. To my mind, that is the most beneficial aspect of the wearing of uniforms in Queensland schools.

The high schools in my electorate have set very high standards, which should be commended and encouraged. The majority of those schools have adopted a school uniform policy for the very reason that they are competing against the move towards private schools and private education in this State. How can we retain students in State high schools in this State if we are not prepared to support the principals of those schools in their adoption of a school uniform policy? I do not find that a problem.

Students in the schools in my electorate speak to me and I have never had a student say to me, "Isn't it terrible that we have to wear school uniforms?" They all seem very happy with the situation. I have a sense of pride in the schools when I see the students in their uniforms rather than seeing them dressed in rag-tag attire which brings discredit to the students.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made with reference to children who do not go to schools that prescribe a school uniform as being somewhat substandard to other children who do wear school uniforms totally offensive to myself—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:**—as my child goes to one of those schools.

**Mr HEGARTY:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am pleased that you have seen fit not to take that point of order.

**Mr Swarten** interjected.

**Mr HEGARTY:** Obviously the Honourable the Minister must have had a different upbringing from the rest of us. I will pass on from that.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. I find that—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The first point is that the member for Redlands continues to reflect on the Chair. That is his last warning. Now, I will take the point of order.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I find that comment offensive and unnecessary and I ask that it be withdrawn.

**Mr HEGARTY:** Mr Deputy Speaker—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! You have been asked to withdraw.

**Mr HEGARTY:** I withdraw anything that he found offensive. I am not sure what he found offensive. There was nothing directed particularly to the Minister.

I think we have pretty well summed up in a few words what this Bill is about. This Bill empowers school communities to have a say in how they run their schools. It is about giving school communities a choice of whether they want to have a school uniform or not.

**Mr Swarten** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing! The member is obviously not taking interjections, so would you please allow him to get on with his speech?

**Mr HEGARTY:** The Honourable the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing is obviously having about the same impact on this debate as Marcel Marceau had on his radio program. All I want to point out is that the vast majority of the school communities in Queensland—

**Mr Swarten** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing will refrain from commenting during the member's speech.

**Mr HEGARTY:** The point of this legislation is to empower Queensland school communities to have a school uniform policy if they wish. It is also about legislating to make sure that there are no legal repercussions against school principals who enforce the wishes of their school communities. It is not a question of whether a school should have a school uniform. We have been through that debate. We know that the vast majority of schools wish to have uniforms. When we look around the 1,300 or 1,400 primary and secondary schools in Queensland we see that the vast majority of them have adopted a school uniform policy. It is backed by the QCPCA and all the other major stakeholders. So it cannot be at odds with the wishes of those representative bodies.

I will conclude by saying that I support the schools in my electorate that have adopted a school uniform policy. When I visit those schools or when I see them at regional and zone sporting days, I feel very proud to see how they stand out. I also note the pride that they have in their schools. If it were not for those school communities adopting individual school uniforms I do not think that they would have that esprit de corps and competitive spirit, which is a very healthy thing to have when the students of those schools finish their schooling and eventually move into the competitive world.

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