



Speech by

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UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND; GATTON COLLEGE

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.28 p.m.): I am very pleased to support the amendment to this motion tonight because it puts the responsibility for decision making regarding the future of the Gatton campus fairly and squarely where it belongs, and that is with the Senate of the University of Queensland. It is the decision-making body. It is interesting that the Opposition called on us to actually get behind the senate as if there was a proposal on the table. In fact, as our amendment also points out, there has been no decision. It says—

"The Parliament notes however the fact that the University of Queensland Senate has not made decisions which would provide a clear direction for the future of Gatton College ..."

The point is that it has not made a decision. As members opposite would know, a review is actually being conducted at the moment by the university to look at the future in relation to the faculties of natural resources, agriculture and veterinary science.

It has to have that review to determine the future, but why is it in that situation of having to conduct that review and why is there this uncertainty? To find out we do not have to go much further than the letter sent by the vice-chancellor to Senator Boswell. The letter, dated 30 June, states—

"The cuts in the forward estimates for funding of universities introduced in the Government's 1996 budget were linked to cuts in the number of places being supported, resulting in pressure to cut intakes from previously planned levels.

These cuts in funding, and the continuing absence of support for pay increases to match community wage movements, have placed pressure on the University to restructure and rationalise its operations in order to make more effective use of expensive resources, particularly its staff, and to improve productivity."

This is the basis of the problems.

I was amazed to note that the member for Crows Nest never even mentioned the Federal Government in his speech. At least other speakers have acknowledged a role for the Federal Government. It was as if the only level of Government responsible for funding for universities was the State Government, when he knows full well that that is not the case.

The policies of the Federal Government in relation to higher education are causing problems the length and breadth of the country, as those opposite would know. I will give a couple of examples of courses or campuses that have been closed. This is the impact of the Federal Government's cuts to operating grants to universities. It is most clearly observed in cuts to these particular areas. At the Northern Territory University, the English Department has gone. At the Australian National University, the Russian Department has gone. At the University of Tasmania, Launceston and Hobart courses have been moved to other campuses. At La Trobe University, the Music Department has gone. At Monash University, the Department of Classics, Pure Maths and English has gone. At Deakin University, the Rusden Campus has gone. All universities are facing these kinds of pressures. Unfortunately, it is no different in Queensland.

People would know that I have been closely associated with James Cook University. It is in an equally difficult situation because of Federal Government policies. It wants to expand on the Cairns

campus. It is using demountable buildings because it does not have the support it needs from the Federal Government.

I think we need to recognise that that is the situation and look to see how we can call on the Opposition to use its influence with the Federal Government. Why is it not out there doing the work with its Federal colleagues? Why is it not out there trying to get the support that everybody knows is necessary if this is to go forward?

Even in light of that, I think it is important to again refer to the letter received by Senator Boswell, because it sets out very clearly the situation with respect to the campus at the moment. The vice-chancellor's letter states—

"In these circumstances the University has an obligation to subject all its activities to rigorous review. It should be permitted to undertake these reviews in a collegial and objective manner and not be forced to conduct them on the basis of often ill-informed media and other public comment."

I think that is a very telling point. Where is that coming from? I can only imagine that it is coming from the members opposite. What is the effect of that? Again I refer to the vice-chancellor, in a letter to Dean Wells. It states—

"In recent months a massive program of mischievous mis-information has resulted in unnecessary anxiety about the future of UQG but has almost certainly helped dissuade many students from considering Gatton among their options."

So the very people in this House who are saying that we should be getting behind Gatton are by their own actions dissuading students from going there. They should have been acting a lot more positively. Then we would not have the problems we are experiencing now.
