



Speech by

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (12.19 p.m.): I am delighted to be able to participate today in this debate on both the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill and the Training Reform Bill. The fact that we have these two bills before the House today I think demonstrates in a very real way that this Beattie Labor government is transforming the way that this state views education issues. It is a pleasure to be able to tell my constituents about the wonderful things happening in the area of education at a state level, but I want to comment very briefly and put on record my absolute disgust at the way the federal government is handling funding for education in Queensland.

I am constantly amazed at the way the federal government seems so determined to so disadvantage ordinary working people when trying to educate their children through the state system and even when trying to educate their children through systems like the Catholic system, particularly here in Queensland. I am constantly amazed that a federal government that would claim the support of what people often call the Howard battlers would so disadvantage Queensland students and so advantage students in elite private schools.

I want to also put on record my absolute disgust at the steps the federal Liberal Party government is taking in the area of third level education. Within my electorate is Queensland's largest university, the University of Queensland, and I have very real concerns for the level of HECS debt that students of that university will end up paying when they complete their degrees. It would seem to me that the federal government has a view that education should be for those who can afford to pay for it, not for those who can earn it on merit. I want to make it very clear that I am very disturbed about this. I want to also put on record my concern that the federal member for Ryan does not seem as concerned about this as I think he ought to be. I encourage him to take more of an interest in the welfare of students at the University of Queensland.

Queensland, I think nowadays, is a Smart State. It was only a few years ago that Queensland had almost a culture of being anti-intellectual. I am very pleased at the steps this government has taken to change the perception of people when it comes to education. I want to speak briefly about a wonderful school that operates within my electorate. It is a school I know the Minister for Employment would be familiar with: the Brisbane Bangla Language School. It is a school that educates children in the Bangla language. The school holds lessons every Sunday morning within the campus of the Indooroopilly State High School. I know the Minister for Employment is a great friend of the Brisbane Bangladeshi community. I know also that he has a great admiration for Bangladesh's national poet, Tagore, and I know that the Bangladeshi community also speak very highly of him.

I want to make the House aware today that Bangla is a language that is often overlooked when it comes to the teaching of LOTE in schools. I am informed by the Parliamentary Library that the Bangla language is spoken by 207 million people world wide and in nine different countries. Depending on whom you believe, it is either the fifth or sixth most widely spoken language in the world. I think there are great opportunities in the future for people who can speak this language.

I spoke recently at the Bangla school night on 13 September, which was held at Indooroopilly State High School, and expressed to them my very strong view that people who live in Australia with a cultural heritage that is Bangladeshi really ought to hang on to the traditions of their homeland and the language of their homeland. I spoke with Bangladesh's high commissioner in Australia, and he expressed to me the view that he would like to see Bangladesh more widely taught in schools in Queensland. I have made some inquiries, and I am delighted to be able to tell the House that it is a language that could be taught within schools as a LOTE non-priority language. I want to encourage parents who perhaps speak Bangla to speak to their schools to see whether they can get a large number of children at an individual school who would like to learn the language as part of their education. That is something they can do and is something I would encourage them to do. I want to thank the Indooroopilly State High School for the way it has made the Brisbane Bangla Language School very welcome. I know the president of the language school, Delwar Khan, speaks very highly of the way that Indooroopilly High has made its little language school so very welcome at Indooroopilly State High School.

I have spoken in the House before of the high level of debating at the Indooroopilly State High School. This is a school that will benefit very much from the legislation before us today. I know that the Queensland Debating Union, with the help of the state government, has just opened up a new office in Taringa, near Indooroopilly. I would like to encourage the QDU to make Indooroopilly High a school that it focuses a lot of attention on. I believe Indooroopilly High is the best state school for debating in Queensland. I think it is a real opportunity for the QDU to develop good ties with it. I am delighted to support these bills today.