



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 20 April 2005

VOLUNTARY STUDENT UNIONISM

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (10.39 pm): I rise this evening to keep a promise to those university students who have come to see me in my office or who have talked to me at various functions, annoyed at the words of some of the members opposite with regard to compulsory student unionism at university. A speech by the member for Mudgeeraba was drawn to my attention. Upon reading what the member had to say, I was outraged by the allegations that were contained in her baseless diatribe. The member said in this House on 24 March—

The introduction of voluntary student unionism is nothing more than a blatant ideological attack on our universities because they are deemed to be a breeding ground for left wing politics and because they dare to criticise the government's massive fee hikes.

The VSU debate is about providing students choice. This is not an attack on student guilds or on the politics of student representatives. The students who came to my office complained that their money was being spent on bussing student representatives to protests against the Iraq war or protests to free those being held in detention centres or being used to print politically driven propaganda. Their gripe was that they did not agree with where their money was going or the message it was being used to promote, yet they were not able to cease being a member of the student guild without ceasing to be a student at the university. VSU is not an attack on these views or opinions; VSU is a vehicle for providing students choice. To suggest otherwise is utterly divisive.

The students I talked to said they would be happy to pay for the services they needed. However, they could not see why they had to pay money for services they did not use. A student at Griffith University, David Anderson, told me that he pays over \$120 a semester on student guild fees. Students at other universities have told me they are forced to pay much more.

Now, this is all well and good if this money is being used for services that it is supposed to be used for. Today, however, we saw a group of university sporting unions spend \$80,000 on advertising to disagree with the government's VSU push saying that scholarships will be slashed. Well, this is my exact point. Maybe those unions could have spent that \$80,000 on 16 \$5,000 scholarships or on \$80,000 worth of sporting equipment.

Many students would not have a problem if these fees were charged by the university so that, firstly, they could be run by those in the university structure with considerably more economic experience than the student union and, secondly, the expenditure of that money could be factored into a student's choice of university. The current arrangement of having to join a club as a separate transaction to being a student looks, smells and walks like third line forcing under the Trade Practices Act. I have a number of other arguments to support VSU, however time prevents me extending on that view.