



Speech by

Michael Choi

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (3.42 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2006, a bill which I believe will improve the certification standards available to our young people attending formal schooling or entering into other vocational pursuits such as TAFE or university. I thank the honourable Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts for introducing such an important piece of legislation in one of the areas I am most passionate about: education. As a parent and father of a daughter who graduated year 12 a couple of weeks ago, I am proud to give my support to the amendments that I believe will strengthen the educational framework already in place.

The Labor government has a long traditional record of education in this country. In my maiden speech I mentioned that when I was young I was brought up in the city of Hong Kong. I say to members of the House that Hong Kong is a wonderful place to visit but not to receive a fine education. Unless they are rich they will not receive a proper education.

In the year 1976 when I migrated to the fine city of Sydney my father brought me to a local state high school. I would not go in there because, considering the stunning playing field and wonderful buildings, I thought that school would be very expensive and it would not be affordable for my father at the time. Little did I know that because that school was a state school it was totally free. A few weeks after I entered that school I was injured in a soccer game and was taken to hospital. Again, I refused to go into the hospital at the time because medical services were very expensive where I was born. Again, little did I know that health services were also free. On another occasion I was spending Saturday morning doing what most Australians would do on the weekend: lawn mowing. Two of my neighbours came to have a chat with me. I asked them, 'How is this nation able to render education and health totally free to its residents?' These two elderly gentlemen—and I will never forget that conversation—said that is the legacy of Labor policy, that education and health services must be free regardless of a person's income level.

Education is important to us. Education is important to our young children. Education is important to people who are perhaps in the lower socioeconomic bracket at the moment. Education is the only way they can improve themselves and change their particular circumstances.

I take this opportunity to thank the teachers, teachers aides, administration staff and all of the many support staff working at our schools who have devoted their life and many hours of their private time as well to provide the best opportunities for our children to learn and to expand their knowledge on a daily basis. Education in Queensland schools enables our young children to adjust to the ever-changing world we live in and contribute to it. The world is changing very rapidly. I will borrow a phrase from the Premier, who usually refers to the world as a very ugly place. It is a very ugly place out there because it is changing so rapidly. At times I am not so sure how my children can follow.

When I was young children would go to their local school. They would probably get a part-time job in the local area to see themselves through college and then they might go to a local university. These days students might go to a local school, but they will go on excursions interstate. Sometimes they even take excursions to other places in the world. When they graduate they often go to a university interstate or maybe in other parts of the world. The world is shrinking and because of that we need a certification

system which enables our students to go into any place in this country—or anywhere in the world for that matter—and demonstrate the education level that they have achieved. This legislation and this certification introduced by the Hon. Rod Welford will enable them to do that.

We all know that the state government is doing everything it can to assist our students. This year we introduced a \$1 billion budget to be spent over the next four years to improve the infrastructure and education standards of our schools. Out of that \$1 billion we gave \$100 million to non-state schools. We also allocated \$50 million over the next two years to improve the infrastructure of our state schools based on community expectation and to be spent on projects they would like to see happen in their school. Unfortunately, the federal government is failing our higher education sector by providing inadequate funding.

I read an article in the *Australian* dated 24 November—only a few days ago—by Verity Edwards. The article quoted Vice-Chancellor Denise Bradley of the University of South Australia. It states—

The nation's universities risk becoming academic backwaters if the federal Government fails to boost funding to the higher education sector.

University of South Australia Vice-Chancellor Denise Bradley said that, while inadequate funding for universities had been a persistent issue for 30 years, the system was getting much worse and was now threatening their credibility overseas.

She further stated that Australia was unusual in that because it is the only OECD country where per capita expenditure on higher education was decreasing. Every single other OECD country realises the importance of educating our young people, realises the importance of free education to all their citizens and so increased their funding to tertiary education. However, this federal government reduces funding to our universities.

Can I suggest to the members opposite that if they want a bright future for the young people in this state and they are really serious about education for our young people then they should pick up the phone and call their colleagues in Canberra and tell them to stop doing what they have been doing over the last eight years. The federal government has to increase the funding to our universities so that they do not have to keep relying on overseas students paying full fees to prop up our university system. I am not saying that we do not welcome overseas students; we do welcome them. I am saying that they should not be used as the means for propping up our university system.

With the indulgence of the House, can I mention the achievement of one of my local state schools. I congratulate the students in year 3 at Capalaba State College on their fantastic win at the Australian Primary School Film Festival for their three-minute conservation awareness film called *What about trees*. These students have achieved an outcome for a project that just started with an idea.

The young children had the idea to try to emphasise the importance of trees in our community. As the parliamentary secretary to the minister for environment I am extremely pleased with what they have achieved. Eight-year-old Caitlin Barbe said that the movie titled *What about trees* was all about trees. She said—

They make homes for animals, they give us shelter and they make air for us ...

I could not put it better myself. The environment is extremely important. It is pleasing to see people as young as eight years old realising the importance of our environment to our future. I am very pleased with this legislation. I once again congratulate the minister and his team on putting this legislation before the House. I commend this bill to the House.