



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (2.54 pm): I rise in support of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. Most significantly, the bill provides for the introduction of the Queensland Certificate of Education or, as I am sure it will become known, the QCE. Those of my colleagues who share my interests in the internal history of the ALP will understand a reservation about using this abbreviation for anything associated with broadening educational opportunities.

Some casual observers might suggest that the QCE will replace the old Senior Certificate, but this would be a gross misreading of the legislation. When it is first issued in 2008, this new senior secondary qualification will be much more than a record of schooling achievement. As the minister put it in his second reading speech, it is a passport to work, training and further learning. These changes and these student accounts that are created by the legislation provide the regulatory environment for the government's commitment to earning or learning, and in recognising the importance of the policy I commend the bill to the House.

While on my feet speaking to this legislation, which supports the further enhancement of the tremendous education system enjoyed by Queenslanders, I would like to comment on the debate surrounding the teaching of history. I do so from the point of view of being a failed history teacher. While I originally trained as a secondary school history teacher in the late 1980s, I went on to avoid putting that training into use in the classroom. The media debate over the teaching of history has been a creation of the federal government and its ideological bedfellows. These history wars appear to be more about attacking classroom teachers and the teaching profession generally than about a genuine discussion about curriculum. The federal education minister appears to be contemplating riding roughshod over the states in relation to the proposal to mandate history as a compulsory stand-alone subject for years 9 and 10. I strongly support our minister for education and my electorate neighbour, the member for Everton, in his resistance of this push. The proposal, like many incursions by this federal coalition government into the states' public policy areas, appears to be shoddily done and driven by an ideological commentariat and the Sydney morning talkback callers and hosts.

The Premier was quite right to reject this approach during his ministerial statement this morning. History is not a collection of dates. It is not indeed the simple or simplistic narrative that Julie Bishop might hope it is. I do not want to be part of cobbling together a so-called history curriculum which might meet the requirements of the federal minister. I can imagine a couple of lessons a week for the year 9s and 10s in our schools where the coherent curriculum—the course work where our history, the world's history and the societies and environments which created them are dissected and discussed—is put on ice or perhaps just thrown out in favour of this Aussie quiz show mentality. I am proud that I got 25 out of 25 on page 2 of today's *Courier-Mail*, but I am much prouder that my rounded, thematically based historical lessons and genuine understanding of issues in Australia's history will allow me to discuss the context and impact of each of the events, people and places mentioned in the quiz that we saw on page 2. Sound positive educators share my opinion.

During the last sitting week I had cause when discussing World Teachers Day to quote from the Mount Alvernia College principal Vicki Ward and her comments in the college newsletter. I have cause to do so again. Ms Ward wrote in reference to the federal minister's proposal—

Julie Bishop, the current federal Education Minister, wants Australian history taught as a narrative. This implies a story. Whose story? For example, 26 January 1788 is the date on which white settlers arrived on our fair shores. What would a student be required to do with this bit of information? Take it at face value and learn it off so that she could reproduce it in a test of facts, or examine this event from many points of view? Were they invaders, migrants or even refugees? One cannot go very far before running into a multitude of narratives. What were the narratives of the English authorities off-loading their society's problems onto unsuspecting Aboriginal society or of the 'problems' themselves, or the people sent to guard them, or the Aboriginal people whose land and resources they commandeered? What were the consequences of this event for everyone concerned right down to the present day? Whose narrative is the definitive story of our national beginnings?

This reflection on how history teaching would need to address the original question of this nation's European history underlines the inadequacy of the ideological attack on teachers and teaching in our schools. Ms Ward went on to comment—

The other thing that irks me is the big stick approach—funding will be cut off if schools don't comply. To my mind, the threat to cut off funding if the government line is not toed is hardly the way to operate in the democracy supposedly celebrated in our history!

I join the Premier, the minister for education and, I hope, the whole of this parliament in warning the federal government to back off from this childish and fundamentally flawed approach of bullying the states to roll out an ill-considered history curriculum change just because Andrew Bolt or Alan Jones are worried about a few future quizmasters. I prefer better future citizens with a more rounded understanding of our history, society and culture.