




Speech By  
**Tony Perrett**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2016

**MOTION: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT**

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (6.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion. This government is playing games with the future of young Queenslanders. It is not really interested in helping them gain skills and find work. It only pretends to help and is being reckless with the futures of youth in regional areas. The only jobs the government helps are those of the big militant unions and their delegates at Labor Party conferences.

In the budget, which was handed down yesterday, we saw this government pay lip-service to addressing the appallingly high level of regional youth unemployment. With the rate of youth unemployment increasing under this government, there was no funding to tackle training and nothing to tackle the declining rates of those undertaking and completing apprenticeships and traineeships. In the past year, 5,500 fewer apprentices and trainees completed their training compared to those in the previous year. In the first nine months of this government, there were 1,800 fewer apprentices and trainees compared to the number in the same period in 2014 under the LNP. Key action items in last year's employment plan have either been scrapped or forgotten. Last year's employment plan contained a commitment to explore the establishment of a rural job agency. We have heard nothing since. The silence is deafening. After eight months of waiting, Jobs Queensland—the \$40 million advisory body that was a key election commitment to advise on skills demand and workforce needs—has not even started.

Those of us who represent regional Queensland are not surprised, because state Labor governments have never delivered. Their track record on regional and youth unemployment is appalling. Under Labor administrations, regional Queenslanders have frustratingly watched the loss of opportunities for local apprenticeships and increasing youth unemployment. Under Labor administrations, we have watched the closure of industries that provided apprenticeships. In Wide Bay, we saw the closure of industries such as the meatworks; forestry, which was sold off by Andrew Fraser; the closure of railway yards; and the forced local government amalgamations with their subsequent closure of council workshops and offices.

Apprenticeships are one of the key drivers in training rural and regional Queenslanders to help them find meaningful jobs. Unfortunately, in the Gympie region, this government's narrow bureaucratic and visionless mindset is hindering a reduction in youth unemployment. Earlier this year, the Brotherhood of St Laurence identified the Wide Bay region as a Queensland and national youth unemployment hot spot. With a youth unemployment rate of 20.6 per cent, it is the second worst in Queensland and the third worst in Australia. The Brotherhood of St Laurence said that youth unemployment—

... needs sustained attention on all fronts: schools, vocational training and universities as well as welfare assistance and employment programs.

Regrettably, this government has systematically prevented and withdrawn increased education opportunities for Gympie locals at both vocational and university level. At the last election, the Labor candidate for Gympie, just like Labor candidates throughout Queensland, was furiously waving placards promising to save TAFE to help young people develop practical skills to help them secure a job. That candidate promised to not only maintain but also increase the number of courses at Gympie TAFE. Less than a year later, the government started closing courses. TAFE Queensland disbanded the delivery of nursing studies out of the Gympie campus. That is right: it closed down courses. Many distressed residents and students keep reminding me of Labor promises. As the continuation of courses was a specific commitment, last year I wrote to the minister seeking an assurance to rule out the removal of or reduction in nursing courses or any other courses from Gympie TAFE. The minister has never responded.

The nursing course was part of a collaborative arrangement that Gympie TAFE had with the University of the Sunshine Coast. It provided a pathway for students to advance to study for a Bachelor of Nursing at the USC at the same precinct. Since 2014, the USC has been trying to expand its Gympie presence so that it could offer more courses. However, since February last year, through sheer bloody-mindedness, the minister continually refuses to support the expansion of courses at Gympie TAFE and prefers to leave an empty and unused building whilst students are denied access.

The minister's paralysis and inaction on a decision regarding the precinct has impacted staff, students and courses. The minister is beholden to the union movement, which does not want to share the campus with anyone but is quite willing for buildings to lie empty and for courses to be gutted. This mindset is reckless. It does nothing for addressing the issue of apprenticeships. It is narrow, bureaucratic and lacks any vision for addressing future employment opportunities for young people. In the interests of young people in the Gympie region, I urge the members opposite to be fair dinkum in addressing apprenticeship issues in my electorate. I urge all members to support this motion.