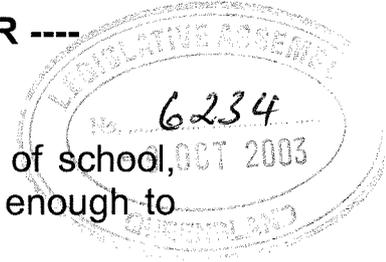


9/10/03

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY EDUCATION MINISTER ----
ANNA BLIGH ---- Higher Education Reforms**



As Queensland Year 12 students enter their final term of school, many of them will be wondering whether they've done enough to secure a university place.

It's a sad fact, Mr Speaker that thousands of school leavers and mature age students who want to go to university will miss out next year.

After almost two years in the portfolio the Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson has failed to offer any hope to these tertiary aspirants.

Dr Nelson's much-touted higher education reform package - which was introduced into Federal Parliament last month, and is being debated in the Senate today - puts ideology over opportunity. It supports increased student fees, deregulation and ties funds to draconian workplace requirements, *but does not offer any relief to growth pressures' fees are until 2007 - cold comfort*
Mr Speaker, access to higher education will increasingly be *to ~~the~~ current* determined by a student's ability to pay, which will leave some of *our* our most capable young minds out in the cold. *senior students*

It comes as no surprise then that the Minister's reform package appears doomed to fail.

Already Labor, the Democrats, Greens and One Nation Senator Len Harris have vowed to reject key elements of the legislation and other key senators have indicated they may follow suit unless there are major changes.

Meeting after meeting of the Senate ~~Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee~~, which is holding public hearings across the country ~~as a prelude to its formal consideration of the legislation~~, have lambasted major elements of the package.

The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee has rejected the Federal Government's "unworkable" industrial relations reforms which they claim are tied to "illusory funding".

For the first time since 1996 – university staff have voted to take a 24 hour nationwide strike at all 38 of Australia's public universities on October 16.

Clearly this is not action the National Tertiary Education Union and its members take lightly.

Again this is in direct response to the Federal Government's threats to deny universities up to \$404 million in extra funds unless they adopt a range of hardline workplace requirements.

Dr Nelson is clearly on the ropes. The reform package he has been crowing about for the past year, is unravelling before his eyes.

To date, the only alterations Dr Nelson has made to his original package include expanding regional loadings for universities to include off-campus students – something Queensland lobbied for – lifting the over-enrolment limit for universities from two to five percent, and establishing a small number of scholarship places which are exempt from the social security income test.

Mr Speaker, this is just tinkering at the edges.

The Federal Minister has failed to move on the ~~big ticket items~~ such as extra subsidised student places and fees. *single biggest issue facing Qld unis to meet growth.*

Mr Speaker, Queensland currently has the highest level of unmet demand for university education in the country.

This year about 7000 eligible Queenslanders were denied a place. And the situation is only going to get worse.

Queensland made its position on the Commonwealth's higher education reforms clear at the Senate Inquiry last month.

Mr Speaker, Queensland will continue to press its case for more fully-subsidised university places to meet our booming population and to rally against reforms that would consign Queenslanders to massive debts upon graduating from university.

The reforms as they stand are not in Queensland's interests or in the national interest.