



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
PROOF
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Budget
SPEECH

Thursday, 10 May 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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| <p>Date Thursday, 10 May 2018 Page 65 Questioner Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p> | <p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p> |
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Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (15:56): Politics is a funny thing. You know that some days will be better than others and some weeks will be better than others. I think everybody in this House, across the divide here, would agree that the Leader of the Opposition, this week, is having an absolute shocker. At the end of the day, we know that he's not a very well liked bloke—and I feel for him in that regard—nor is he trusted. But, as has been emphasised by others, we have been reminded today that he did make the rolled-gold commitment, that guarantee, that none of his team in the Labor Party would be engaged in the citizenship saga, and, of course, four have had to resign. Four cannot sit in this parliament. He's been caught out.

You would think, at a time like this, his team would fall in behind him and give him a bit of support because the man is on his knees. Yet the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has brought this MPI to the House for debate. She's put on the House's agenda a debate about vocational education and training. She knows, as the loyal deputy, that her leader failed disastrously as the minister for employment. In his last gig as a minister of a government, 110,000 apprentices were lost from the system. So, the loyal deputy comes in and says: 'Let's tell Australia about it. Let's again shine a light on the Leader of the Opposition's absolute incompetence.' That's why he should never be Prime Minister. And the Leader of the Opposition's deputy probably doesn't want him to be either, because she wants the gig. I think that's actually why we're here today; I think that's why we're debating this. Why else would the Labor Party put up an MPI about getting jobs, when we have a record job-making government right now? We have over 1,000 jobs being created every single day, and they want to talk about jobs! I think they're out for the Leader of the Opposition.

But if they want to talk about history, let's talk about history. The Labor Party in government introduced two schemes, which we had to inherit because they were partnership agreements. One of those schemes was the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform. We recently replaced Labor's national partnership agreement with the Skilling Australians Fund. We also replaced Labor's VET FEE-HELP program with the VET Students Loans scheme. Let's take both of those schemes of the Labor Party. The national partnership agreement effectively disconnected the vocational education and training sector from the real market economy. A sector that provided the training was disconnected from the very industries that accepted the graduates. And Labor did this purposely, not by an accidental rule of the pencil or the pen. Labor reduced the incentives for employers nine times. A total of \$1.2 billion of incentives for employers, encouraging them to take on people out of the VET system, was gone from the system, disconnecting the real economy from the suppliers of vocational education and training. What was the end result? The end result was young people in Australia being trained and having debt, but no job—no job, but debt. That is the result of their program, as well as the reduction in that final year alone of 110,000 apprentices. It's an absolute disgrace.

Let's talk about VET FEE-HELP. That has already been covered a lot in this House over the last 12 months. Incentives were provided as a big blank cheque. The Labor Party crafted this framework, and it led to dodgy providers right across the country, bringing the very sector they're talking about today into disrepute. That is why you saw TAFE become the victim of the Labor Party's actions. That is why TAFE's market share dropped from 60 per cent to 49 per cent. It was simply because of Labor's actions.

In response, are we fixing this? Yes, we are. We are fixing this now with positive action, by promoting trades. We are fixing this now with a \$1.5 billion investment, as we saw in the budget. We are fixing this now with 300,000 new apprentices over the forward estimates. That's a government that cares. That's a government taking action.