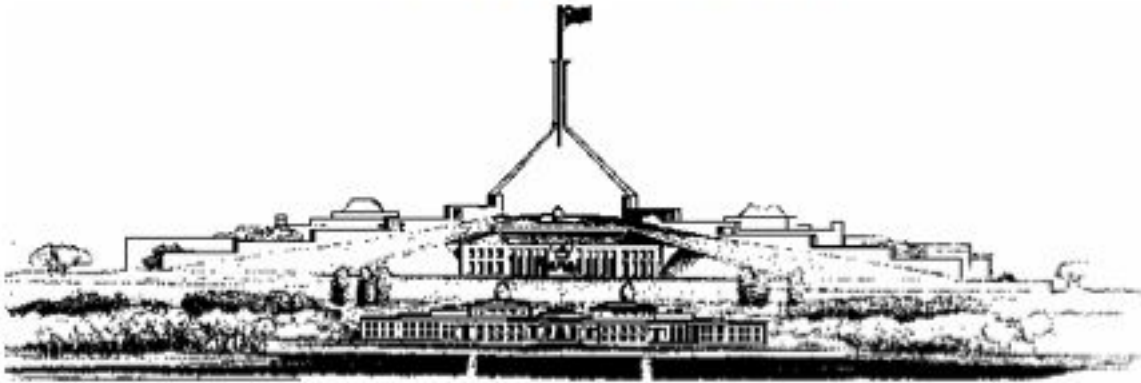




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

BILLS

**Australian Education Bill 2013,
Australian Education (Consequential
and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 26 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 26 June 2013
Page 31
Questioner
Speaker McKenzie, Sen Bridget

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (12:51): I rise to speak on the Australian Education Bill 2013, the related bill, and the 70-odd amendments. I think it is a record, and I would appreciate somebody telling me whether it is, but it is one of many records for this government. The thematic approach we have heard this morning from the speakers in this debate is one of waste, lack of consultation and disregard for good governance and for good parliamentary process. It is a thematic line that this Gillard government and the Rudd government seem to have lived by and will die by.

In its politicised DNA, partisan to the end, the Gillard government is using education policy to divide. As a former educator I am greatly disappointed to be standing here now, after work has been done on a needs based model to ensure that education right across our nation is of a high standard and quality, with state pitted against state, system against system, in a bidding war.

The Prime Minister's approach to premiers has just beggared belief throughout this. We have heard some representations about that here today in the states' house. Tasmania is going through a grab for cash. I am sure at the ALP state conference on the weekend there will be the wrapped-up-in-a-box signature that everyone is looking for, but that will not happen before the Premier of Tasmania has sought to ensure that it will not lose the \$105 million of extra GST funds it already receives for education.

In media reports there were comments earlier from the Northern Territory about how the Prime Minister is approaching a co-operative and supportive conversation about something of such national significance as a 'once-in-a-generation change to our education system'. She has asked for a response by the NT and has warned that funding under the national partnership agreement may be reconsidered if the Territory government does not cooperate. Federal education minister, Peter Garrett, says that the Territory government is playing a dangerous game by refusing to cooperate in negotiations.

My home state of Victoria has been in the media raising concerns that it has had with this negotiation. I use the term 'negotiation' lightly because it implies a conversation. Minister Dixon wrote to the Commonwealth at the start of this month asking to hold joint negotiations. Similarly, there have been concerns

raised in the media, from Victoria's perspective, about constitutional issues with the bill before us. We know—it has been mentioned before—that until a couple of weeks ago this was just an aspirational piece of paper that nobody who cares about the future of our nation and the quality of education being delivered to our young people right across this nation could disagree with. Yet, as always, the devil is in the detail—and we have the devil before us today. The constitutional issues were raised by numerous states including, earlier this week in Tasmania, by Premier Giddings.

There are concerns about increased Commonwealth policy oversight of state schools through the National Plan for School Improvement. This is yet another attempt by the Gillard government to grab power from the states and override the states' constitutional obligation to be in control of what happens on the ground within their own jurisdictions when it comes to education.

Haste has meant that none of these issues has been able to be examined and considered by the Senate and our systems. The Australian people expect us to be thorough in this place on their behalf; not to spend their money—\$100 billion—without scrutiny. That is exactly why every single one of us is in this chamber. We are here not just to govern but also, on behalf of the Australian people, to consider the devil in the detail, to come to some conclusions and to proceed from there. But this government is careless with our democracy.

Issues were raised. As has been mentioned, I was part of the inquiry into the aspirational four-page document and the much more detailed 129-page document, with its 70-odd amendments—the three-day inquiry, as Senator Back and I like to call it. There was no opportunity to seek clarification on written submissions and to delve further into the detail that stakeholders had raised.

I would like to counter some of the claims that Senator Pratt made in her commentary on regional schools in WA. She said that if the Nationals were serious about standing up for kids attending schools in regional areas then they would be backing this bill. That is exactly why you have to look at the detail, Senator Pratt. When you look at the mechanism that is being used to determine the loading for location under this model you find that it is the ARIA model. That is fine if you

are in a regional school in WA but if you are in a regional school in Victoria that has a different meaning and there is a different understanding of it. Under the ARIA model, as we discovered in estimates, relative to regional schools in WA, Victorian regional schools will be worse off. So check the *Hansard* on that one and get back to me. Unfortunately, in two minutes the time for debate will be over so we will not be able to hear the response from the government on that.

So this debate has been a farce and reduced to emotive slogans that even the owner of the name seems not to back, as these bills—and, more importantly, the negotiated reality—have skewed the report from David Gonski, which I think was delivered in December 2011. So, this is not a new conversation. Whilst we have had 70 amendments, with the devil in their detail, before us for a couple of weeks, we have been talking about this for 2½ years.

A government senator interjecting—

Senator McKENZIE: Minister, you may say, 'Exactly!' but then you are expecting stakeholders and states to back the slogans without being able to go through the detail. It is not an appropriate way to govern and it is not a once-in-a-generation reform.

Finally, I would like to reject outright any aspersions that the coalition does not back, as the birth right of every single citizen of this nation, the right to a quality education, private or public. For people across the way to assume that, because we want to scrutinise this—because state governments that are governed by parties that are on our side of politics are not rushing to sign up, because we have some questions we want to prosecute, because we do not want potentially to throw \$100 billion away, because we want to get right—we do not think it is the birthright of every young Australian to receive a quality education, is offensive in the extreme.

Those of us on this side of the chamber know that, of the million young people that attend school in this country outside metropolitan cities, 660,000 attend state schools. So how can we back our communities without backing quality education in the regions in state schools that are focused on student outcomes? That, again brings me to the objectives in part 3(1) (i). As an educator I have real issues with a quality education being determined by a PISA result. That concern is actually shared by the AEU and the IEU, and I suggest you check out their quotes in our report to this bill. A quality education cannot simply be measured by statistics. The top five, by 2025—what a ridiculous measure to ascertain the quality of our education and—

The PRESIDENT: Order! The time allotted for the consideration of these bills has expired. The question

is that the amendment on sheet 7404 moved by Senator Mason be agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: In respect of the Australian Education Bill 2013, the question is that the amendment on sheet 7429 circulated by the Australian Greens, be agreed to.

Question negatived.

The PRESIDENT: The question now is that these bills be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a second time.

The PRESIDENT: In respect of the Australian Education Bill 2013, the question is that amendment (1) on sheet 7410 and amendments (1) and (2) on sheet 7409, circulated by the Australian Greens, be agreed to.

Senator Wright: I had understood that they were going to be moved separately.

The PRESIDENT: Not that I know of.

Senator Wright: In that case, I would seek to have a division on them.

The PRESIDENT: You want to divide on the outcome?

Senator Wright: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: I will put the vote again. The question is that amendment (1) on sheet 7410 and amendments (1) and (2) on sheet 7409, circulated by the Australian Greens, be agreed to.