



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Bendigo Electorate: Sarah Sheedy

SPEECH

Tuesday, 25 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 25 June 2013
Page 112
Questioner
Speaker McKenzie, Sen Bridget

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (00:18): I rise today to speak about the future of the National Party and, in particular, about the Nationals' candidate for the federal seat of Bendigo, Sarah Sheedy. Sarah was preselected last weekend and will be the first Nationals candidate to stand in the seat of Bendigo for 15 years.

At just 25 years old, Sarah is the future of the party and of Australian politics more generally. She is young, passionate and committed and is ready to be a voice for her electorate and to work tirelessly to achieve positive outcomes for the people of Bendigo. Born and bred in Bendigo, Sarah is an example of grassroots politics. She was involved in the Young Nationals and is heavily involved in the community that she seeks to represent. She was educated in Bendigo and is the product of Bendigo's La Trobe University, a regional education hub which is thriving.

Sarah believes, as I do, that in order to sustain growth and economic development, we firstly need to attract and retain skilled professionals in regional areas. I think this has to start with providing incentives for young people to study at tertiary level in regional settings. She believes that Bendigo is a regional city with a bright future in the realm of education, and she wants to make sure it is a place that offers many opportunities for further education and training, as well as a place with world-class schools. To make it easier for young people from Bendigo and surrounding areas to study, Sarah is keen to lobby for easier access to youth allowance for those in the regions. While Sarah is passionate about education, particularly education for students in regional areas, she knows federal university funding has suffered a blow under the Gillard government.

The Gillard government has raided universities to raise money for its Gonski education reforms. Bendigo's La Trobe University campus has been dealt a severe blow. It will be impacted to the tune of an estimated \$20 million. The Gonski package removes \$900 million from university grants and then converts student scholarships into loans and removes a discount for upfront payment of HECS fees. Sarah believes that it makes no sense to say you are improving one level of education in Australia by ripping the guts out of another. La Trobe Bendigo is doing all it can to meet regional needs, demonstrated by its exciting plans for

a full medical school. But how can it thrive when the Gillard government pulls its funding?

It is an alarming fact that students from regional areas are not accessing tertiary education at the same rates as metropolitan students. Just 17 per cent of 25- to 35-year-olds from regional areas have a bachelors degree or above, compared with 36 per cent of the same age group who live in cities. In remote areas the figures are worse at 15.4 per cent. The national target following the Bradley review is for 40 per cent of all 25- to 34-year-olds to have a bachelor degree or above by 2025. Clearly there is a lot of hard work to do to narrow the gap between regional and city students.

Labor's decision in 2010 to implement a parental income test for regional and remote students applying for independent youth allowance has disadvantaged those students and their parents and exacerbated the difficulties faced by regional students when trying to access further education. We have to acknowledge that regional students meet a long series of criteria, such as working and living away from home, to prove they are independent of their parents, and can be automatically disqualified if gross combined parental income exceeds \$150,000, which is a teacher and a police officer's wage in regional areas.

Sarah believes, as I do, that Bendigo is a good fit for the Nationals as a city and a region. It is a great reflection of the modern National Party. It has vibrant and growing urban hubs, a strong agricultural sector, a thriving cultural community, and equally important health and education sectors. Its strengths include tourism, the arts, sports and manufacturing. It is a nationally important financial centre as well as a regional university city.

Sarah is passionate about her community. She wants to make a difference, and she wants to help improve the lives of others. In her own words: 'I am here for the long haul. I want to be seen as an individual that is giving our community a real choice at the next election'. She is a great choice for Bendigo and for the Nationals. She carries on the proud legacy of the National Party but also signals a changing of the guard. She is the next generation of leaders. She is the future not only of our party but also for Bendigo.