



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Youth Allowance**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 30 May 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 30 May 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Mr SIDEBOTTOM

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Braddon) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (20:41): What we have with this motion tonight is a repetition of several stunts by those opposite—

Mr Secker: It's not a stunt; that's outrageous!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM: Thank you; you have had your four-pence worth. It is a stunt to raise an issue which this government is now, and has been for some time, taking on board. I do not deny the difficulty with the inner and outer regional classifications. The member for Barker and others here know that I have been critical of that for some time and remain so—and, with them and others in here, on my own side as well, saw to it that we had a review, and that is what we are indeed doing. So let us get the facts on the table for a start. We are having a review led by Professor Kwong Lee Dow, who has been going around regional and rural Australia taking evidence, and we have a commitment to do something about it, to remove the inequity in terms of eligibility distinctions that the member for Barker pointed out and which exists in my electorate. So I recognise that.

But, you see, we are dealing with this motion, which is in effect purely and simply rehashing an argument. And nowhere—apart from in the contribution of the member for Barker, to be fair to him—does it recognise the fantastic record that this government is now able to make some claim to in getting more students to university, and most especially more students from rural and regional Australia. I am glad the member for Barker was at least reasonable in making that case, because it was not the case with the member for Sturt or any other speaker that I heard from the other side. I think it is important, therefore, to restate that case: many more families and students are eligible for support to go to university now than ever before—and that is a tremendous record.

We know that the reforms are striking a chord with students, particularly students with disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, the number of students receiving the maximum youth allowance—now, listen to this—has increased by 108 per cent. In anybody's terms, that is a policy that is working. It is doing what it is intended to do and on the grounds of equity, notwithstanding some of those anomalies have been raised both over

here and by those on the other side. Importantly, the number of rural and regional university students receiving youth allowance has increased by 22 per cent. So, we have those on the other side telling us about the hard-luck stories, and I am not sure how they go about quantifying those, but there are many more good-luck stories because of this support scheme. There has been a 15 per cent increase in the total number of university students receiving youth allowance, so the scholarship program has also added to this and been highly successful. For example, more than 240,000 university students have received Start-Up scholarships towards their education costs, and more than 55,000 of the 240,000 are from rural and regional areas. Also, more than 36,000 university students who need to move away from home to study have received relocation scholarship payments towards their accommodation costs. That is more than 15,000 who are from rural and regional areas.

So, yes, there are some anomalies, but by far the greatest percentage of rural and regional students and their families benefit from this fantastic reform program. More than 170,000 young people have already benefited from our changes, because they are either eligible for youth allowance for the first time or they are receiving more money than before. More than 36,000 of these young people are from rural and regional Australia.

We have changed the parental income test, we have lowered the age of independence, and, when the personal income test threshold increases from \$236 to \$400 per fortnight from 1 July 2012, students will be allowed to earn more money through part-time work before their payments are affected. There are anomalies, but there are fantastic stories as a result of this legislation. (*Time expired*)

(Barker) (NaN.NaN pm)

(Braddon) (NaN.NaN pm)