



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Rene Levi

SPEECH

Thursday, 19 November 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP	Question No.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.40 pm)—There are three things I would like to raise today. The first is that I would like to pay my respects, sympathies and condolences to the family of Rene Levi, a 15-year-old boy at Latrobe High School who unfortunately lost his life a couple of days ago in a tragic drowning accident at Latrobe in the eastern end of my electorate. This tragedy has had a dramatic effect on the school and the local community and I want to pass on my sympathies not just to his family—I know they would be grieving greatly—but also to the school community, Phil McKenzie, the staff and students, and the Latrobe community itself. It is a great tragedy and I am very, very sorry for the family and for all those involved.

On a more positive note I would like to thank Telstra and their new CEO, David Thodey, for doing something which I hoped for but did not believe would happen. They have rescinded what I thought was a terrible decision, particularly in terms of customer relations, charging a \$2.20 fee for people who paid their bills across the counter and also increasing charges for people who used a credit card to pay their bill. Mr Thodey, on the very day that we announced the proposed restructuring of Telstra, rang me that night—and I thanked him very much for taking the time out on what was a perplexing day for him to say the least—and discussed with me this very charge, because I had written to him, left messages and started a community campaign with other members on both sides of the House.

I said to Mr Thodey that I could not believe how this policy that Telstra introduced got under his radar and that this was the policy of the last regime, of Sol Trujillo and co., but not his because his was a customer-orientated, customer-agent, customer-directed new Telstra. I said to him, ‘Why don’t you go to your next annual general meeting and stand up and say, “This is not the Telstra I want to lead. We rescind this.” ‘ That was my wildest hope and in actual fact that is exactly what happened. They have rescinded the policy. They are going to repay everybody who paid that \$2.20 and they have also said that it is not the way of the future, that it is not the way to treat their customers. Really it was just an underhanded way to try and herd people onto the internet, people who were not ready for that, who do not like doing that and who are paying legal tender.

Anyway to cut a long story short, thank you to David Thodey, thank you to Telstra for listening to their customers. I think it was a really good example of what is starting to happen in corporate Australia, because I noticed the CEO of Westpac made an extraordinary statement the other day: they are going back to introducing branches for person-to-person contact with the bank. Jack Hill the blind miner could see, when they started to pull branches and force people into the electronic means of banking, that there were a lot of people who like a sense of community and the personal, one-to-one transaction, and they are starting to move back. You will see this starting to happen in corporate Australia: giving people choice again about how they go about their business, so that is really good. Well done, David Thodey; well done to Telstra; well done to everybody who was part of the community campaign to rescind this.

I would also like to congratulate the Tasmanian government on taking up a situation which was pretty complex, one which was born in politics and I thought would die in politics—that is, the apparent demise of the Australian Technical College Northern Tasmania. Our commitments were fulfilled until the end of this financial year. There was a strong community campaign by the college, the students and parents and the community that benefit from it, and the state government is now going to incorporate the Australian Technical College but retain an alternative complementary entity that can work in with the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms for education. I do thank the state government for that. It is going to give some certitude and continuity to those students, their parents and employers into the future, so well done to all involved in that campaign as well.

Question agreed to.