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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

TAFE NSW: Too Good to Lose

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While I have been speaking out in this place about the Baird Government's cuts to TAFE since the election last year, I have been fighting alongside TAFE teachers and students for many years. I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of my colleague, our hardworking shadow Minister for TAFE, and thank her for caring about students and teachers. I stand with her in supporting TAFE.

I have been fighting alongside TAFE teachers and students to save TAFE because I know that the only way to ensure young people find work, the only way to ensure our economy has workers with modern skills, and the only way to ensure quality education outcomes are put ahead of private profits, is to protect the TAFE system we have now—a system that has long been the envy of the developed world.

TAFE teachers and students have been fighting because they know that TAFE is the best. It is the only provider of quality vocational and technical training.

TAFE teachers and students know that the conservatives within the Baird Government will do anything to appease the big business shonks and opportunists in the private sector. That is because this Government and every one of its members are ideologically opposed to public education and ideologically opposed to giving working-class people the best possible start in life.

We have seen what the private vocational training sector is capable of. It is filled with mostly rip-off merchants without peer. Private vocational training providers are being raided by the Australian Federal Police and are under investigation for serious malfeasance, but they are the crooks being put forward by this Government and the Minister for Skills as the preferred alternative to quality public education.

In the midst of a mini construction boom, what does this Government do? It cuts TAFE teachers. It cuts TAFE teachers who specialise in trades training and in the skills for which demand is the highest.

Anna Patty reported in the *Sydney MorningHerald* earlier this week that the Government is presiding over a complete gutting of construction and glazing staff at TAFE in Lidcombe. That is just beyond belief. TAFE NSW's South Western Sydney Institute will have its painting and decorating teaching staff cut from seven to four.

We have a situation where, in the midst of growing demand for these trades, our Government is deliberately and systematically deskilling our workforce and eroding the collective capacity of Australian workers to undertake this type of work.

This is a malevolent and despicable attack on Australian workers by the Liberal Party.

But Mike Baird is not the only one responsible for the cuts to TAFE. His Canberra mates are just as keen to undermine public education. Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals are dead against public education. They also stand against public transport and against public broadcasting, so you have to wonder: Are they just against the public altogether? But I digress.

Eighteen months ago the Federal Liberal Government abolished the Tools for Your Trade scheme. This provided \$5,500 to young people to get them started in a trade and to ensure they were able to secure an apprenticeship from an employer. When you are starting out as an apprentice, you cannot borrow your boss' tools. There is no toolkit on the worksite for you to dip into. You need to stump up the money for comprehensive, quality tools yourself. This allowance made sure that young people were ready to learn and ready to work.

But the Liberals do not care about young tradies making their way into the workforce. They are ideologically opposed to Australian workers having the skills and the resources necessary to compete on quality. This Government would prefer it if employees were forced to compete on price instead. The comprehensive deskilling of our workforce and the withdrawal of key support programs for new apprentices will undermine the entire workforce and ensure a race to the bottom on wages, safety and workplace conditions. That is this Government's endgame.

Its ideology is focused on maximising profits for employers and big business. That is why its habitually slashes public education and hands off taxpayers' money to shonky rip-off merchants in the private vocational training sector, and that is why it fundamentally does not care about the long-term impacts that this defunding and deskilling exercise will have on our economy and our society.

I will not stop fighting for TAFE in this Parliament.

I will not stop calling out the spivs, crooks and rip-off merchants in the private sector who want to profit from taxpayers' money—and I will not stop highlighting the criminality of the attacks on public education by Mike Baird and the Liberals.