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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION COMMISSION AMENDMENT (FUNDING GUARANTEE FOR TAFE) BILL 2016

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I speak in support of the member for Londonderry's private member's bill, the Technical and Further Education Commission Amendment (Funding Guarantee for TAFE) Bill 2016.

This bill will cap contestable public funding for private training providers at a maximum of 30 per cent.

This bill has been brought as a private member's bill by Labor twice now after the Government blocked its progress earlier this year. The bill is necessary because the Baird Liberal Government is responsible for the attempted decimation of TAFE in New South Wales.

TAFE is one of the great public institutions of New South Wales. It is one of the great democratic and social equalisers that allows working-class people to improve their lives.

Young people, the unemployed and older workers rely on TAFE to provide them with the opportunity to gain skills for a new career. Access to quality education, trade training and new vocational skills are social justice issues.

Today, Labor members say unequivocally that we support public education, we will fight to save TAFE, and we will not stand by while this conservative Government further erodes TAFE's status as the first choice public training provider of New South Wales.

There are 126,000 fewer students enrolled in TAFE this year than in 2012. That is a fact. There are 14,500 fewer students with a disability enrolled. That is a fact.

These people are being turned away either because courses are being cut, staffing and resources are inadequate, or, all too often, fees have been jacked up so high as to be completely unaffordable.

As well as the many thousands of students who are not enrolling in TAFE anymore, there are also more than 5,000 TAFE teachers who have left since 2012. The Minister says this has happened through voluntary redundancies. They have been sacked. That is the legacy of the Baird Government.

In years to come, this Government and its Premier will not be remembered fondly for their new tollways or casinos. They will be best known and held in contempt for being the conservative government that tried to destroy TAFE. It is a disgraceful legacy and they should be ashamed of themselves.

We already have a skills shortage in this State and in this country. The Federal Government tells us that we need skilled migrants to move here temporarily to undertake work that local workers do not have the skills and experience to do. Rather than see this Federal policy as the alarm bell that it is, the Baird Government and the Minister for Skills choose to further undermine and belittle the role of TAFE in providing crucial skilled workers for our economy.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* repeatedly notes that many of the TAFE teachers being purged by the Baird Government teach core trades like building, carpentry and plumbing. What an absurd situation to force upon the people of New South Wales. It is 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 skilled and rewarding work.

The Liberal-Nationals would rather condemn a generation of young Australians to unemployment or menial work and import labour from overseas.

It is hardly surprising because, as we know, this will have the effect of eroding standards of employment, safety expectations, wages and workplace conditions. That is their reason for being. There is not one Australian worker whose pay they do not want to cut.

They work on behalf of big business and their donors who resent paying workers a decent wage and ensuring safety on the job.

Unsurprisingly, a privatisation angle is at play. If the Baird Government can discourage enough students from enrolling and sack enough teachers, it will be left with empty campuses across the State which it can flog off to its mates in the private sector. That is the strategy at play in New South Wales under Mike Baird: privatisation 101.

In order to privatise, it first has to destroy the quality of service that is provided to the public. It then has to demoralise, bully and demean public servants on the payroll. Once the public has lost confidence, a private operator is offered up as an alternative to the once excellent public service that has been deliberately wrecked.

A leaked Cabinet document showed that the Government is planning a fire sale or closure of \$63 million worth of TAFE campuses across the State. TAFE sites earmarked for full sale include Chullora, Epping, Belrose, Scone, Dapto, Vincentia, Maclean, Murwillumbah, Corowa, Narrandera and Grenfell. That is what is happening in New South Wales under Mike Baird and the Liberals. They are wreckers.

The Nationals, who should know better, are sitting alongside Mike Baird and offering absolutely no opposition. They are the party of the bush apparently, but one would not know it in this place because they are incapable of offering any resistance to the city-centric policies of Mike Baird and the Liberals. They serve absolutely no purpose.

TAFE is a crucial public institution across the State, but it is especially important for working-class people in our regional and rural areas. The Nationals deserve to lose the by-election in Orange for a number of reasons. The people of Orange should first consider the future of the Orange college, which is part of the TAFE Western network of colleges. TAFE Western in Orange delivers more than 65 courses across a diverse range of industries, from engineering and fabrication to veterinary nursing. The skills taught at Orange are critical to the economic and social health of a major regional centre.

What does this Government have planned for TAFE Western in Orange? We know from its track record that course cuts, staff cuts and fee hikes will continue unless some legislative protection is passed by this Parliament.

At a recent budget estimates hearing, the Minister for Skills refused to rule out selling off the campuses in Orange. The voters in Orange should be grateful that Andrew Gee jumped off the sinking ship that is the Baird Government because he has given them an opportunity to send a message to Mike Baird and the failed Deputy Premier Troy Grant at the upcoming by-election that it is unacceptable for a government to neglect and undermine our public TAFE system.

Under the Baird Government, TAFE as we know it is being completely destroyed. We have seen a 22 per cent jump in course fees paid by students and the number of apprentices and trainees plummet by 44 per cent. We have seen \$573 million wasted on a disastrous new IT system that does not work.

I am pleased that the Minister acknowledge that in this Chamber today, but when will it stop? Apparently not for another 18 months. It is

bewildering what this Government will allow that to happen under its watch.

I acknowledge and thank all the fabulous TAFE teachers, TAFE students and TAFE organisers for their fight to save TAFE NSW against sustained attacks. I particularly acknowledge the work of Maurie Mulheron, Pat Forward, Maxine Sharkey, Phil Chadwick, Rob Long, Kathy Nicholson and Annette Bennett.

I commend this bill to the Legislative Assembly.

Labor will restore TAFE and we will limit contestable funding and the transfer of public money to shonky criminals in the private vocational training sector.

Labor will restore confidence in our public education system, and we will support TAFE teachers to continue providing world-class quality education to our young people and job seekers at any stage in their life.