

TERTIARY STUDENT UNION FEES

Grievance

MRS J. HUGHES (Kingsley) [9.26 am]: My grievance is directed to the Minister for Sport and Recreation and relates to the commonwealth government's proposed Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005, and the impacts that the legislation would have on the level of funding for university sport and recreation programs and facilities. Universities have traditionally relied on the income raised by such compulsory contributions to provide subsidised access to amenities and facilities, directly or through student associations, for the benefit of all students. The commonwealth government is not proposing to compensate universities for the loss of this key funding source. Its effect will be to rip tens of millions of dollars from programs for student welfare.

I would like to thank Mr Richard Goodwin from Edith Cowan University for his input. He wrote -

At ECU no student is compelled to join the Student Guild as a condition of enrolment. However, the University does collect a compulsory annual Amenities and Services Fee which is used to fund the provision of a number of vital non-academic services and facilities which improves the quality of campus services and enhances the lives of students.

The fee has been set by the University Council on the advice of the Student Guild . . .

They are modest rates. He also wrote -

The amount of fees collected each year by the University is approximately \$1.5 million.

The removal of collectively funded non-academic services and facilities will hit students hard, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who do not have ready support systems such as the thousands of international students who attend ECU.

If the Bill passes through Parliament in its current form, the University is faced with the prospect of making up the shortfall in funding or removing the services.

. . . it is not possible for the University to make up the shortfall nor is it practical to provide these services on a user pays basis given economies of scale and the seasonal conditions underpinning demand.

In order to help the University provide a supportive campus environment for all its students, we seek the support of Parliamentarians for the right to collect a 'compulsory amenities and services fee'. This fee could be used to support a set of key facilities and services that meet only the pastoral needs of students. A common set of services, to be tailored to suit the circumstances of each university, could include:

- * Sporting facilities
- * Computer facilities
- * International student service
- * Child care
- * Dental services
- * Welfare services
- * Photocopying facilities
- * Sporting clubs and societies.

It is my understanding that university sport and recreation bodies invest almost \$60 million in facilities and services each year, and that the proposed legislation would strip more than \$30 million from their budgets.

Many great Australian sportspeople have recognised the impending catastrophe that this legislation would create in sporting activities and facilities. People like Shane Gould, John Coates, Kevin Gosper, Stuart MacGill, Geoff Lawson, Phil Kearns, Liz Ellis, Phil Waugh and Ric Charlesworth have warned that the bill could destroy university sport. Right around Australia, major sporting organisations are recognising the threat that this legislation would pose to not just university sport, but sport across the country. Kevin Gosper has said that scrapping compulsory union fees for tertiary students could have a dramatic impact on funding for university sport, and the Australian Olympic Committee has warned that the bill could rip \$100 million from university sporting programs. University sport has produced many great Olympians over the years, and the AOC was right to have expressed its concern. University support and scholarships for elite athletes will be put at risk by these changes.

In May the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne announced that, due to the proposed changes, they would no longer be able to consider joining a nationwide network set up by the federal government's Australian Sports Commission aimed at helping elite athletes to balance sport and study. These two universities

alone will lose more than \$6.3 million in sports fees every year if the VSU legislation is passed. They have stated that this will mean they will be unable to provide the required sports facilities to elite athletes. I understand that even the commonwealth Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator Rod Kemp, and federal coalition members such as Alan Eggleston and Barnaby Joyce, have raised concerns about the impact of this bill on university amenities, including sport.

The increase in the school leaving age, and the fact that it will now be compulsory for students to complete years 11 and 12, will mean that many more students will be given the opportunity to enter the university stream through the pending changes to the curriculum. Therefore, this legislation will impact greatly on Edith Cowan University and the young people in my electorate.

I ask the minister to consider this issue and determine whether there are any alternative ways in which we can assist students and thereby minimise some of the impacts of this legislation on universities such as ECU.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Sport and Recreation) [9.31 am]: I thank the member for Kingsley for raising this very important issue. If the voluntary student unionism legislation goes through, it will be an absolute disaster, not just for the universities of Australia but also for young sportspeople and sporting teams that aspire to be world greats. Frankly, this legislation, if we look at it in its entirety, is tantamount to the Nazis burning books. This legislation is absolutely atrocious.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Gee! What did you have for breakfast?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: This legislation that is proposed to be implemented by the federal government would have a devastating impact on all university students and on university games generally. If we take out the politics and the stupid ideology that has brought about this legislation and look just at the impact of this legislation, it is obvious that the health of the entire nation, and the capacity of Australia to compete on the international sporting scene, will be greatly affected. The vast majority of our elite athletes come from the university system. The university system supports all the major sports institutes across this nation. This legislation will starve them totally of the funds that support them.

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The member for Vasse has obviously never been a sports person and does not understand this issue. The other great problem with the member for Vasse is that ignorance can be fixed; stupidity is forever.

The legislation that is being debated in the federal Parliament will have many impacts.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: As a person who went through the university system and has a medical degree, that is a ridiculous statement to make, and the member for Dawesville knows it.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: That demonstrates the depth of ignorance on the other side of the house.

This legislation will jeopardise \$600 million worth of sporting infrastructure in this nation. It will have a negative health impact, member for Dawesville, on students and many members of the general public. It will lead to a reduction in funding for our elite athletes -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: This is amazing! I am pleased the member for Kingsley raised this issue. The members for South Perth and Murdoch, who profess to support sport in this state, should be up in arms over this legislation, because it will remove the opportunity for this nation to be the leader in sports across the world. It will also lead to the loss of some 1 400 jobs in the university sector over the next two years. As the member for Kingsley pointed out, John Coates, the President of the Australian Olympic Committee, was in this state recently to talk to our universities about the impact of this legislation on sport for all the people of this nation.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: If the member for Dawesville has something sensible to say, he should say it; otherwise, he should just shut up.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is not just the universities that will suffer from these cuts. As you can see, Mr Speaker, I am particularly passionate about this matter. I have just returned from the South African Institute of Sport, which praises the system that we have set up in this state. It is interesting to note that even the federal Liberal Minister for the Arts and Sport, Hon Rod Kemp, sees the disaster that this legislation will cause for the sports program. For once, even Alan Eggleston, our local senator, has stood up against his own party on this legislation. He is a medical practitioner of some note, unlike some others in this house. He knows what sport can do for the health of people in our nation.

I will move on quickly to outline how this legislation will impact on Western Australia alone. Members on the other side of the house scoff at this, but the loss of this revenue to our universities will approximate \$800 000 a year in the fees that flow to sporting facilities in this state. Drastic cuts have already been foreshadowed by all our major universities. It will lead to a severe reduction in investment in sport and recreation facilities for all the affiliated clubs. All the clubs that are affiliated with the universities - the hockey clubs and the rugby clubs - will suffer. I am sure the member for Dawesville will scoff when he goes to his masters hockey games. He will say that it does not matter that the federal Liberal Party will be taking the club's money away and that it does not matter whether the club collapses. The varsity sports competitions will be put under extreme threat. The viability of the Australian University Games, which attracted 5 000 competitors to Western Australia over five days this year, will go by the board. The viability of the Indian Rim University Games, which are scheduled for Perth this year, will go by the board. I do not have a concern about the politics of this legislation. That is the federal government's business. My concern is that because of the stupid ideology that is causing the federal government to push this senseless piece of legislation through the federal Parliament, every individual who goes to a university in this nation will be denied the capacity to compete in elite sports. The vast majority of the elite sportspeople in this state - the 54 Western Australians who went to the Olympic Games in Athens - came from the university elite sports programs. Those programs will go by the board because of this senseless piece of legislation.

Dr S.C. Thomas interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Regional campuses - the member for Capel is a regional member - will also be affected. The Muresk Institute campus of Curtin University of Technology spends 50 per cent of its amenities and services fees on sport. Muresk supplies some of the finest regional sportspeople in this state. If the federal government wants to follow this stupid and senseless ideology, fine. However, why not listen to what Kim Beazley and Jenny Macklin have said? An ideal compromise has been found in this state. This state has been practising that compromise for the past two years. That means that our universities are now well supported. However, because of this piece of senseless ideology, sport in this nation will go to the dogs. I urge every member of this house, particularly those who scoffed this morning, and particularly the members for South Perth and Murdoch, to stand up to their own party's ideology and do something about this legislation.