



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

BILLS

**Social Security and Other Legislation
Amendment (Further 2012 Budget
and Other Measures) Bill 2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 1 November 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 1 November 2012
Page 36
Questioner
Speaker Scullion, Sen Nigel

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator SCULLION (Northern Territory—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) (12:52): I rise to support the bill before us, the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Further 2012 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2012. Fundamentally this bill extends periods of time for what are colloquially referred to as the Cape York welfare reform trials and a number of the associated initiatives. The program links welfare payments to re-engagement factors, including school attendance and some tenancy issues in the communities. The communities principally are Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale on the cape. There are some initiatives at Mossman Gorge and other associated parts of this hub.

Welfare reform creates incentives for individuals rather than groups and communities in this regard. The well-motivated intention is to re-establish what we in mainstream Australia would see as social norms. As part of the re-engagement, particularly in terms of education, it should be noted that we not only support government in this but also take the opportunity to commend the Cape York Institute and all of the staff associated with the implementation and delivery on the ground of what nobody could describe as anything other than considerable change. It is very difficult to imagine implementing a fundamentally new and different education program. Imagine starting school on Monday and suddenly the education program is considerably different in terms of what is being taught and the way it is being taught. One would think in the initial stages this would be very difficult, but in my view, it has been an outstanding success.

A fundamental part of this change is direct instruction. I have studied the direct instruction model in several places, including parts of the United States. Whilst the demographic we are attempting to change is somewhat different, the successes are there for all to see. I spend a lot of time in Aboriginal communities, as do many people on both sides of this chamber. As in a lot of classrooms, the young people in these communities are all pretty excited. It is almost like walking into a zoo sometimes, with things flying everywhere. Sometimes I wonder how anything happens in these classrooms. I was astonished to find in a classroom in Aurukun recently that the fact that somebody had walked in was only a minor distraction for a few seconds. Then they were back on to the lesson and absolutely focused. I was impressed with the impact of the discipline and

the process of direct instruction which is all about behaviour as well as the learning program. I think that is absolutely fantastic. In a wider sense, a less micro sense in terms of some of the changes these trials are attempting to make, the Families Responsibilities Commission has done an outstanding job. It is all about forming good relationships based on trust. Clearly the Families Responsibilities Commission and the staff have done an outstanding job.

While supporting the government in this initiative, I would question—and I think quite reasonably—why this trial has only been extended for a year. For a parent or a teacher of one of the students, when we have seen such outstandingly good results, to have the tenure of the program extended by just a year would make them think: what am I planning for next year? Do I stay in Aurukun or Hope Vale? Am I committed to this new and exciting educational process that is making, by anyone's measure and according to all the empirical science, outstanding achievements? There has been an increase in attendance from 43 per cent to over 80 per cent—fantastic achievements across the board.

People have to make up their minds whether they are committed to this. This is about people; it is not like writing a note and throwing it in the fire. This is about changing methods and building our capacity in people. People have to make a decision, but we are only extending it for a year. Their life decisions are made on this basis. They will be saying, 'Great, another year of security.' It appears that the convention in this place and others is that we do things on a year-by-year basis. I think this trial has provided such hope not only to those communities but also to other communities across Australia. Eventually the outcome of these trials will be implemented in other communities. I think we should have the capacity to make an investment in this very important initiative for more than a year. Notwithstanding that criticism, the opposition are delighted to assist in this initiative.