



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Social Security and Other Legislation
Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2011**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 6 July 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Ms RISHWORTH

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(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (18:15): I will speak very briefly on the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2011. I do think this is a very important bill that should be passed by the House and I am pleased that there is support on both sides of the chamber. I am very proud to be an Australian because in Australia we do provide a safety net for those in need. This is something that is ingrained in our psyche as Australians. When people are doing it tough, they do get assistance. I think there is broad support in our community for those who need help to actually get that help. So I am proud that we have a safety net and a social security system in this country.

This bill reinforces that the social security system has integrity. The vast majority of Australians that go into their local Centrelink in times of trouble and times of need are very upfront and honest and deserve the support that they get, but there are instances, as the previous speaker pointed out, where this is not abided by. A very small minority go in and are not upfront and honest, despite knowing that they should be. This does unfortunately call into question the integrity of all those people receiving these social security payments. It is unfair that the actions of the few cast aspersions on the many who do that right thing. I believe these amendments are very important for the integrity of this system.

As the previous speakers have outlined, this bill arose as a result of a court case in South Australia. I believe the intentions of the Commonwealth and the requirements placed on social security recipients have been clear, but based on this technicality that clarity is being called into question. As a result, in many instances where fraud has been proven in a court of law people may get off those charges. That is a concern. It is also a concern that new charges of defrauding the Commonwealth are not necessarily proceeding as quickly as they could have because of the lack of clarity at the moment. It is important that we bring forward and pass this legislation, despite the fact that this matter is still going through the High Court. It is the duty of the parliament and the Commonwealth, being responsible for the social security system, to bring this legislation forward. So I am pleased that it has the support of the House.

I want to use this opportunity to talk about the hardworking people at Centrelink. The many people around the country administering our social security system do a great job on the front line. In my electorate there is a great amount of work being done at the Noarlunga Centrelink office. It is sometimes a tough job. At times there are distressed people, upset people and people in real difficulty, but I believe that Centrelink staff right around this country do a great job. I would like to talk about Noarlunga in particular because I know the staff there do not just sit back and wait for people to come to them; they play a real outreach role in the community. In fact, I attended a special fair day for those suffering from mental illness where all the services got together to talk to the local community. Centrelink was there with the staff and the manager. The manager of a large Centrelink office was there on the front line talking to people, letting them know what they can access and what is available. We know that those who are most vulnerable often do not know what they can access. They can access different payments and services, and sometimes they do not know. Our Centrelink staff have been out there doing that.

There have been many other opportunities where Centrelink staff from Noarlunga have done outreach work. Whether it be youth or Indigenous people, they go into those communities to talk to those people in need who may benefit from a number of services and payments. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Centrelink staff, specifically at Noarlunga but also right around the country, who work in this area. They also need to have confidence that, when they assess someone and they are getting information, they can be confident to act on that information. This legislation ensures that there is that mutual responsibility for people to acknowledge when their income changes—and as the previous speaker said, it can be by quite a lot. People know that their income changes. While it might be only a few people, it is important that this legislation is supported. We have an obligation to support it and pass it through the House now because the Australian people, while very generous in their nature and willing to help people in need, do not want to be defrauded. This legislation is really important to ensure that we can have confidence in the integrity of our social security system, that we continue to support those people in need and that

those people who defraud the Commonwealth face the consequences of doing so. I commend the bill to the House.