



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

Indigenous Affairs

SPEECH

Thursday, 25 February 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Date Thursday, 25 February 2016 Page 68 Questioner Speaker Fawcett, Sen David</p> | <p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p> |
|---|--|

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (16:22): I also rise to speak on the motion to take note of the answers from Senator Scullion. I want to start off by recognising Senator Sterle and his genuine passion and concern for the people of Western Australia, particularly in Indigenous communities. In relation to his questioning of Senator Scullion though, I have to draw attention back to previous occasions when Senator Sterle has come in here with information that has been provided to him by people on the ground and with their view of what may or may not happen and has raised questions or made accusations about things closing down.

I take the Senate back to September 2014 where he asked questions about communities in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. He said that these centres were closing and he asked what the families were going to do. Senator Scullion pointed out:

The direct answer to your question is they are going to continue to go to these family and children centres because they are staying open. They are not going anywhere.

The point I make is that Senator Scullion, in his answer, is coming from the position of someone who lives in the Northern Territory, cares deeply for Indigenous communities and connects with people—

Senator Sterle: Ms Acting Deputy President, I raise a point of order. The good senator, unfortunately, is misleading the chamber. This is false information, and he should check with the minister's office and see how under-resourced these communities and these centres are. They have waiting lists. Kids are waiting to get in there, and this coalition cut the funding.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order; it is a debating point.

Senator FAWCETT: Checking the record, I am quoting directly from the *Hansard* here. My point is that what the government is concerned about doing is getting outcomes for people. If you go back to my very first speech in this place, one of the things that I talked about was that a disappointing aspect of so much of politics is that people love to talk about the inputs. They talk about money spent or programs announced and then they move on to the next thing. One of the things I like about Senator Scullion in particular is that he is really concerned about getting outcomes for people, not just about making announcements. He drives policy announcements and he drives the implementation to make sure they actually deliver outcomes.

His key priorities in Indigenous affairs are getting children to school, getting adults into work and helping to build safer communities. Despite the threats, the talk and the fear campaigns about cutting front-line services, the fact is that the government is still continuing to invest some \$4.9 billion over four years in Indigenous-specific funding. The government is not just focused on the funding though; it is focused on getting outcomes. Part of that is working in partnership with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver better outcomes for our first Australians. I think this minister deserves a huge amount of credit for the amount of passion and attention to detail that he puts into this portfolio area and into getting those outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The budget update, the MYEFO—which is where some of the claims around funding have come from—includes that additional \$48 million for the portfolio, as part of the white paper on developing northern Australia. This funding will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the North maximise the use of their land, including through better support for native title holders, improved leasing arrangements and reforms to land administration. The fact that that money is coming in through a different portfolio area but is applying to Indigenous people living in the North is indicative of the fact that the best way for them to develop their communities, as we are seeing from comments by Noel Pearson and others, is for them to engage with modern Australia and the modern economy and to provide opportunities for their children to have work, to see businesses grow and to see enterprises grow.

The enabling things, like better use of land title and the ability to develop business, are equally, if not more, powerful than some of the specific funding that goes into Indigenous programs. They provide those linkages to other aspects of the economy that will give them an opportunity to grow all of the things that Noel Pearson talks about, in terms of the achievements, the pride and the satisfaction of having some control and influence over their future.

In taking note of this answer from Senator Scullion, I just want to reinforce the fact that he is a person concerned about outcomes. The government is continuing to invest significant amounts of money not only into Indigenous-specific portfolio areas but also into related areas that combine to provide people with an opportunity to achieve those goals of getting kids into school—because they will actually have a future and a reason to be there—getting adults into work and building safer communities, both for adults and, importantly, for children.