

### Agreement in Principle

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL** (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [10.09 a.m.]: I acknowledge the member for Mount Druitt, but this bill is about another institution, not him. I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The University of Technology (Kuring-gai Campus) Bill has a clear and simple purpose. It will ensure that the Lindfield site of the university continues to be preserved and used only for educational purposes. The need for this legislation is clear. A part 3A application exists that would see the University of Technology Ku-ring-gai campus site used not for educational purposes but used for residential development. That residential development would have 350 units built on the site, a site that the University of Technology obtained for a dollar in 1990.

The site of the University of Technology Sydney, Ku-ring-gai campus, has been used for educational purposes since February 1961. The site was purchased for £44,000 in the 1950s. The member for Mt Druitt will remember that currency! In February 1961, the then State Labor Government purchased the site for educational purposes. In 1971, William Balmain Teachers College opened on the site. In 1974 that teachers college changed its name to the Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education, and in 1990, under Federal and State reforms, the University of Technology, Sydney was created with the former Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education at its Ku-ring-gai campus at Lindfield as part of the university.

The site was transferred to the University of Technology Sydney for a dollar, as I have said; to be fair, other sites were transferred to other universities for a dollar. The devil in this whole process was that no-one at that stage believed or considered the option that the site may one day be no longer needed for educational purposes by that university, and as a result, there was no buy-back clause for the same dollar that was handed over. But it is important to remember that public funds have been spent on this site, not just the original purchase price of £44,000, but Federal funds totalling millions of dollars were spent when the College of Advanced Education and the University of Technology were created. The buildings on this site have won architectural awards. They have won architectural awards for good reason.

It is important to note though that under the legislation establishing the University of Technology Sydney, section 18(2) states:

The council shall not except with the approval of the Minister, alienate, mortgage or demise any lands of the university.

We could short-circuit this process. We could do away with the need for passage of this legislation if the Hon. Verity Firth, the Minister for Education, would simply make a public commitment that she will not seek to approve the alienation, the mortgage or the demise of any land of the University of Technology, Ku-ring-gai, Lindfield campus. Despite repeated requests, that commitment has not been forthcoming from the Minister. That surprises me, because the Minister knows of the need for additional educational facilities in northern Sydney. Indeed, I delayed the introduction of this legislation because last year the Department of Education and Training undertook a study of the potential use of the University of Technology Ku-ring-gai site for secondary education within the northern region. Within the department it is known that the northern region of Sydney, the region that I represent, along with the member for Davidson and the member for Willoughby, is short the equivalent of a high school.

Mr Speaker, you do not have to come from your part of New South Wales to understand that trying to build a high school in an already established residential area is very difficult. Here we have a site that is now surplus, so the university council says, to the needs of the University of Technology itself, which could and should be used for continuing education purposes. The Department of Education has undertaken a study, which we have not yet seen, but it is a study based on the need for additional educational facilities within this region. Yet, the Minister for Education is not prepared to use her powers under the existing University of Technology Sydney Act to stand up and say this site should be preserved.

On 29 September 2010 the Deputy Director General, Finance and Infrastructure of the Department of Education, Mr Alastair Hunter, wrote to one of my constituents about the issue of overcrowding at Killara High School, and that is a separate issue that the member for Davidson ventilates well in this House. In the course of the letter, in trying to explain or calm the parent down in relation to the overcrowding at Killara High School, the following was said:

There are proposals under the Department's consideration to expand, upgrade and refurbish the facilities at Killara High School. These are subject to budget approval.

It goes on to say:

The Department is also currently negotiating the acquisition of additional recreational space for students. It has a proposal in place to acquire a large site near Killara High School to provide additional high school facilities for up to 1,500 students.

I do not know where such a large site could be that could house 1,500 students if it is not the University of Technology, Ku-ring-gai at Lindfield campus, because we do not have a lot of open space in my electorate. The only open space is indeed national parks, and whilst at times we are sceptical about the Minister for the Environment's genuine commitment to the environment, we do not believe he would alienate either Lane Cove or Ku-ring-gai National Parks for educational purposes.

This piece of legislation I present today is a no brainer. It is a no brainer for three reasons. Firstly, there is a need for additional educational facilities in this region; secondly, the fact that as recently as 29 September 2010 that has been confirmed by the Deputy Director General, Finance and Infrastructure, Department of Education and Training; thirdly, there is an opportunity, using a precedent established by this Government, to preserve this site for educational purposes. In 1999 when another former College of Advanced Education site was about to be disposed of by another university, this State Government rushed legislation through this Parliament to stop the sale of that site, to ensure that it was preserved for educational purposes. The then Minister of Education said:

I am not willing to see a valued educational facility like that at St George wound down and taken out of the public domain.

She went on to say:

The public interest will suffer if the university effectively removes the land from public use.

Both of those statements are true in relation to the University of Technology, Ku-ring-gai at Lindfield campus; it is true when we consider the need for educational facilities for a senior high school or a full high school in the region. It is as true for the Lindfield campus of the University of Technology Sydney, as it was for the St George campus of the University of New South Wales 11 years ago. This Government has created a precedent. This Government has demonstrated how land like this can be preserved. The land we are talking about should be preserved.

I continue to keep local residents informed about this. One of the dilemmas about the residential development on this site is that the University of Technology, Ku-ring-gai at Lindfield campus is at the end of Eton Road. It overlooks the entrance to Lane Cove National Park. It is a magnificent site itself. It overlooks a magnificent part of Sydney. It is at the end of a long suburban road. It is not 100 metres from the railway station. The addition of 350 units of varying sizes would significantly increase traffic in the area, traffic in an area that is already blighted by rat running, particularly during peak periods. Local residents are understandably concerned. There was a meeting recently that I was unable to attend because I was at the other end of the electorate. There are proposals from others, for Gore Hill TAFE to be moved there.

I am happy for the Department of Education to determine what its priorities are in terms of whether it is a senior high school, a full high school, a TAFE or for some other educational purposes. What I am determined and clear about is that this site should and must be preserved for educational purposes. That can be achieved in two ways. One way is the Minister for Education refusing to sign off on any development under section 18 (2) of the University of Technology Sydney Act. The second way is for passage of this legislation in line with the passage 11 years ago of a similar bill about the St George campus of the University of New South Wales. That is a precedent, a solution of this Labor Government, and the same solution that should be applied here if the Minister for Education is not prepared to act to preserve the site. I commend the bill to the House.