

HURLSTONE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL SITE BILL 2016

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Anoulack Chanthivong, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields) (12:28): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In introducing the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2016 I am reminded of something that I expressed in my inaugural speech in this place almost 12 months ago. In that speech I said:

We are here to serve our fellow citizens and to open up opportunities for their aspirations .

I went on to say:

Public education is fundamental to a fairer and more prosperous NSW. I know this because I have lived it. When Government's underinvest in our education or training systems or seek to commercialise what is a valuable commodity ... We deny people the opportunity to fulfil their potential .

The bill before the House today seeks to give expression to the ideas that I articulated in my inaugural speech. This bill seeks to give expression to the ideas that I articulated in my inaugural speech. Fundamental to the hopes and the aspirations of my local constituents is the desire for world-class public education for their children. In my electorate and in the public sector that means a place at Hurlstone. Places at Hurlstone are highly coveted; I cannot emphasise that enough, and why would they not be? Hurlstone, its name, its history, its reputation and even its uniform are synonymous with excellence, opportunity and a better future. Reputations like Hurlstone's are not earned overnight. They are built over decades. In the case of Hurlstone it is more than 100 years.

From its initial vision by John Kinloch in 1878, to the school reopening in 1907, to its relocation to Glenfield in 1926, Hurlstone has led the way in rural education and academic excellence for generations. But now all that is under threat. That is why the bill I have introduced today is needed more than ever. This bill will protect Hurlstone's heritage, history and future at Glenfield; preserve its working farm and the green open space; promote educational hope, opportunity and aspiration in south-west Sydney; and prevent any greedy developer destroying our prized environment and our prized school for 30 pieces of silver. I quote the following words:

It would be a sad indictment of the character of any member of this Parliament who would contemplate a vote to sell off the proud heritage of Hurlstone Agricultural High School to property developers for 30 pieces of silver ... there could be no greater insult to the memory of Corporal John Edmondson, VC. It begs the question whether anything is sacred to this mob, which is desperate to stay in power for the sake of staying in power. The Hurlstone farm is a vital resource for the quality teaching of agriculture. The decision to sell the land is based on the notion that the school has surplus land. However, agriculture involves practical experience; you cannot teach it out of a book ... Hurlstone agricultural farm has no surplus land.

Those eloquent words are not the words of the current Labor member for Macquarie Fields; they are the words of the Hon. Charlie Lynn, and former Liberal member of the Legislative Council in his contribution to the second reading speech on the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. Although those words were said about seven years ago, they are just as appropriate today, if not more appropriate. Charlie was right in every sense. Who would contemplate selling Hurlstone's proud heritage for 30 pieces of silver? Who would insult the memory of Hurlstone's alumni, including that of John Edmondson, VC? Who would declare the farm surplus? Who would deny local students a practical experience of agriculture? The answer is the Baird Liberal-Nationals Government.

In a backflip worthy of an Olympic gold medal, in an act of breathtaking hypocrisy, in an act of absolute treachery, the Baird Liberal-Nationals Government, led by the Minister of Education, is now proposing the exact opposite of what it sought to achieve and voted on back in 2009. Let me go through, one by one, the reasons why the Government should vote for this bill. On 13 March 2009 Mr Stoner, then Leader of the National Party, said the following in this House when speaking on the 2009 Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill:

Hurlstone Agricultural High School is an educational facility that has tremendous significance in the history of this great State. The school has a proud tradition with outstanding alumni throughout New South Wales, across the nation and internationally .

Like his Coalition colleague Charlie Lynn, Mr Stoner was 100 per cent correct. Hurlstone is a school with tremendous significance. It does have a great tradition and does produce outstanding alumni, both across the nation and internationally. Graduates like John Edmondson, VC; Sir William Keys, decorated World War II Royal Australian Air Force pilot Ron Rankin; former Federal Treasurer and Primary Industries Minister, the Hon. John Kerin; the current head of the Defence Force, Mr Mark Binskin; Professor Alan Trounson; Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane; actress Kate Ritchie; former Wallaby David Lyons; and members of the band Human Nature. The list could go

on and on. Every year Hurlstone produces some of the most outstanding results in the Higher School Certificate and is always ranked in the top 20 to 25 schools.

The first reason why this bill needs support is that south-west Sydney needs a school of Hurlstone's history, calibre and reputation. I am afraid that a non-descript, no name selective school just does not cut it. Surely the fact that Hurlstone is to be relocated is because the Minister knows the worth and value of Hurlstone's history and legacy. The Minister knows that one cannot buy and create educational prestige overnight. Any proposed relocation and removal more than 50 kilometres away from its rightful home at Glenfield can best be summed up with these words:

The relocation of Hurlstone is impractical and the school should be retained in its current form.

Put simply, "it is ridiculous" for the Government to consider moving the school from Glenfield. These were Minister Piccoli's words back in 2009 when he fought so hard to save Hurlstone. They remain as relevant if not more relevant today than they were back in 2009. I could not agree with him more—it is impractical and just ridiculous. On 26 March 2009 the Deputy Speaker said the following regarding Hurlstone when the 2009 bill was being debated. He stated:

Those students go to Hurlstone Agricultural High School because they do not have access to the same opportunities anywhere else in Sydney or even close to Sydney ...

But this Government is going to take away that opportunity for children to learn about agriculture ... We are taking away a school that provides an initiative for people to go into the agricultural sector in this State.

Minister Pru Goward said similar things on 4 June 2009 when she said :

The loss of the Hurlstone Agricultural High School farm will deny a significant proportion of the future New South Wales agricultural industry workforce an opportunity to learn how that is best done.

Both Deputy Speaker George and Minister Goward, still members of this House, are surely right. South-west Sydney students need real, practical exposure to agriculture. They need access to a real farm and what better place is there than Hurlstone Agricultural High School at Glenfield—right bang in the middle of the south-west growth corridor and suburbia. What is also fundamentally concerning about the sell-off and removal of Hurlstone's farm at Glenfield is the loss of educational opportunities that this educational icon provides for the kids of south-west Sydney. Deloitte Access Economics estimates agribusiness to be a top five major growth industry producing more than \$40 billion in exports in 2015, with forecasted double-digit growth and global opportunities for rising exports, economic growth and income.

By relocating and selling off Hurlstone's farm to developers, Minister Piccoli is denying the kids of south-west Sydney an opportunity to study and to share in the rising income and economic prosperity of the growing agribusiness industry. Minister Piccoli should remember he was quoted as saying on 1 April 2009 that he understood the importance of agricultural education. With Minister Piccoli's decision to remove Hurlstone from Glenfield, he must mean that this agricultural educational importance does not apply to the kids of south-west Sydney.

A quick analysis of the Hawkesbury shows that there are four existing schools, each within spitting distance from the Western Sydney University campus that already teach agriculture. These are Windsor High School, which is nine kilometres away; Colo High School, which is 5.5 kilometres away; Richmond High School, which is 1.3 kilometres away and Hawkesbury High School, which is 1.7 kilometres away. The prospectus of Richmond High states that it has one of New South Wales highest performing agricultural show teams and prides itself on the quality of its agricultural programs. Hawkesbury High's plan for 2015-17 mentions that it has "excellent facilities with an agricultural farm". Windsor High's curriculum handbook outlines animals, plants, tractors and agricultural shows and that agriculture is a subject for students.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Bruce Notley-Smith): In accordance with sessional orders debate is interrupted for the consideration of General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills). I set down the resumption of the second reading speech as an order of the day for a future day.

HURLSTONE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL SITE BILL 2016

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 12 May 2016.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields) (10:55): I thank the House for allowing me to continue my interrupted second reading speech on the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2016. I spoke of the Baird Liberal-Nationals Government's betrayal and breach of trust in selling off Hurlstone and its farm when in 2009 it loudly voiced its opposition and voted for a bill to save Hurlstone from being sold to developers. I will continue to outline the reasons that Minister Piccoli's decision to sell Hurlstone and the farm, and sell out the community in the process, is plain wrong. Four local schools presently teach agriculture, or a similar curriculum, in the Hawkesbury. I previously outlined the credentials of Windsor, Richmond and Hawkesbury.

Colo High has "a proud reputation for high-quality agricultural teaching and learning programs, in addition to being champions of major competitions like the Penrith Show poultry competition, the Royal Easter Show poultry showmanship and the school's cattle team entered the UniSchools Steer Challenge". It is ridiculous therefore to locate yet another school teaching much the same material in the same district and catchment area. With four local high schools nearby, there is already an adequate supply of agricultural education in the Hawkesbury. It does not require this Minister to deny south-west Sydney the same educational opportunities through the destruction of Hurlstone's farm and its removal from Glenfield.

If the demand for agricultural education is so high, then the four current high schools have plenty of capacity to meet the demand. If demand for agricultural education is stagnating or declining in the Hawkesbury region then oversupplying the Hawkesbury market with a fifth school will do nothing to address the deeper structural, social and economic demand factors that have led to that situation. Either way, the Minister's argument about the need for Hurlstone to be in the Hawkesbury does not make any sense. This is about picking winners and losers, and the families and students of Macquarie Fields and south-west Sydney are clearly the losers. I am amazed that the Auditor-General has not picked up on the proposed duplication of resources and facilities at a time when public resources are being stretched further across so many areas. This Minister sees duplication as good policy.

It is surely an example of duplicative public spending on a grand scale when facilities already exist. Students from my electorate are not going to make the minimum one and a half hour—closer to two hour—trek each way to go the Hawkesbury to receive a quality agricultural education. That is simply beyond belief. As the Deputy Speaker and the member for Goulburn pointed out just a few years ago, students from my part of Sydney will be denied a vital opportunity if this school is allowed to move. As the shadow education spokesperson in 2009, Mr Piccoli said, "I would have thought that supporting schools in south-west Sydney would have been a priority". It is certainly my priority, and that of the community, to keep Hurlstone and its farm at Glenfield. Is it still the Minister's priority? It is obviously not, given his betrayal and policy backflip. One of the most important reasons that this bill needs Government support was debated at length in 2009. It relates to the green buffer that the Hurlstone site at Glenfield provides. On 13 March 2009 former Leader of The Nationals, Mr Stoner, said:

That is an absolute disgrace, not only for the delivery of agricultural education, but also for western Sydney—140 hectares of green space in western Sydney is invaluable.

The member for Barwon took up a similar theme when he said:

The area is the lungs of western and south western Sydney. People who live in that part of the world are far healthier because of the open space, clean water and lack of traffic congestion.

Minister Goward also wanted to get in on the act when she stated on 4 June 2009:

It is a very important piece of green space in a part of Sydney that is rapidly becoming part of the tar and cement of the city.

All speakers on the 2009 bill highlighted this one key, vital aspect—that is, the need for south-west Sydney to have valuable green space, for it to have lungs and for it to have fresh air. If the education Minister has not noticed, south-west Sydney is already drowning in overdevelopment and congestion. Since 2009 the situation has become worse. In terms of housing development, the Macquarie Fields electorate is already doing more than its fair share and carrying a heavier burden than most areas. When I drive around my electorate what was once open space and farmland is now choked, or will be choked, with ever-expanding developments such as Edmondson Park, Willowdale, Emerald Hills, Bardia, Ingleburn Gardens and Denham Court.

The need for the green open space of Hurlstone's farm is even more important than before. What is the Minister's response? It is more urban sprawl, more urban splatter, more homes on top of

one another, more traffic, more tar and a cement city landscape. The continual destruction and uncontrolled development will only add to congestion and put added stress on services.

As the Hon. Charlie Lynn so aptly put it in 2009, all of this is being done so that the Minister can get his 30 pieces of silver. This really is shameful, and my community has had enough. We do not need more environmental destruction and choked communities; we need valuable green open space and a strong local school like Hurlstone Agricultural High School with its working farm to continue to give the students and families of South West Sydney a better life through quality public education. This Minister's disregard for his colleagues' opinions expressed just a few years ago is mind blowing. If the Minister will not listen to me, he should listen to them. The objects of this bill are:

- (a) to ensure that the Hurlstone Agricultural High School site (**the site**) remains in public ownership, and
- (b) to limit the use of the site to that of a government school.

We want educational land in public ownership to be used for public education. Clause 5 of the bill is headed "Hurlstone Agricultural High School site not to be sold". It should not be sold; there should be no sell-off, no deal and no development. Clause 6 restricts development of Hurlstone's farm for anything other than government school purposes. That is clear and unambiguous in anyone's language. This bill, its objects and its clauses are all too familiar to Minister Piccoli and many members of the Liberal-Nationals Government. These are the same words that were in the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. It is the same bill, it contains the same words, and it has the same purpose—to prevent Hurlstone Agricultural High School being sold.

This is the same bill that Adrian Piccoli loudly vouched for in public and proudly voted for in Parliament on 25 June 2009. Of course, he was not the only Liberal-Nationals member to vote in support of the 2009 bill. I will list some of the other members who felt so strongly about saving Hurlstone that they were willing to have their name recorded as supporting the 2009 bill in this Parliament: the current Treasurer, Gladys Berejiklian, and current senior Cabinet ministers Andrew Constance, Victor Dominello, Pru Goward, Brad Hazzard, Anthony Roberts, Jillian Skinner, and Rob Stokes. Kevin Humphries not only voted for the bill but also came out to Hurlstone for photo opps with Adrian Piccoli. Even the Premier voted to save Hurlstone in 2009. In his inaugural speech in 2007 he stated:

Tonight I want to talk about three ideas that I believe will restore and strengthen public trust in our major political parties and in this wonderful institution.

Is this what restoring and strengthening public trust looks like under this Premier and his Minister for Education? We have seen policy backflips, public betrayal and political promises that have no purpose except to mislead. How can we restore and strengthen public trust in our major political parties and this wonderful institution when the Minister for Education has so blatantly gone back on his word, betrayed my community, and backflipped on what was an article of faith? The Premier does not need three ideas; he simply needs one: Leave Hurlstone Agricultural High School and its farm at Glenfield alone and give the children of South West Sydney a better chance at a better life with a great local school with valuable green open space.

Episodes like Minister Piccoli's hypocrisy on Hurlstone take me back to polling day in 2015, when a softly spoken and well-informed gentleman at Robert Townson Public School approached me as he left the polling booth and said that both he and his son had just voted informal. It was a pox on both major political parties. Who could blame him when we have misleading community campaigns defending Hurlstone and then the very same person, the Minister for Education, going back on every word, every promise and every public statement he made just a few years later? This act of betrayal of Hurlstone demeans all members and devalues the Parliament as a public institution. The decision to destroy Hurlstone at Glenfield will be seen by our community as yet another broken promise, another breach of trust and another betrayal of their faith in politicians and in the Parliament. It reinforces political gamesmanship and represents political self-interest trumping the public interest.

It is no wonder that more and more Australians have less trust in major political parties and are parking their votes in minor parties. The danger for our democracy if this trend continues is the growing influence of fringe or protest parties derailing reasoned evidence-based democratic debate, a higher frequency of blocking and stalemate in much-needed legislative and policy reform, and the gerrymandering of public policy for vested interests. This represents a vicious political cycle, and we in the major political parties have only ourselves to blame because we simply could not do the thing right by keeping our word having run such a strong campaign with regard to a policy position. Back in 2009, the Hon. Charlie Lynn concluded his speech by stating:

Obviously the Government does not see any value in protecting the last famed green belt separating us from Sydney's ugly urban sprawl. This is just a greedy cash grab ... the sale is bad for education, bad for agriculture and bad for the local community.

The Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson also stated:

There is an old saying: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

I must admit that I cannot improve on those words; they perfectly sum up the issues. It is extremely sad that the words said in 2009 are as relevant—if not more so—today. As the member for Macquarie Fields—an area that I have called home since my days at Robert Townson Public School—I am delighted to introduce the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2016 on the behalf of my community to protect Hurlstone's heritage, history and future at Glenfield, to preserve Hurlstone's working farm and the green open space, to promote educational hope, opportunity and aspiration in South West Sydney, and to prevent any politician letting greedy developers from destroying our environment and taking away our prized school for 30 pieces of silver. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.