

Legislative Assembly
Tuesday 17th November 2009

HIGHER EDUCATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Declaration as Urgent — Motion

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [5.07 pm]: I would like to make a few comments on the Higher Education Amendment Bill 2009, and particularly the university to which it relates. As the member for Midland stated, this bill is basically designed to allow the minister to begin the process of setting up a new university in Western Australia. It relates in this case to an application from Raffles University, which, as the name would imply, is based in Singapore. The interest of Raffles should be read as a strong tick for higher education in Western Australia. Raffles University has had a long relationship with Western Australia in that it was for some years the provider of educational services in Singapore on behalf of Curtin University of Technology. As many members will be aware, Curtin University decided a couple of years ago to build a campus of its own in Singapore, and therefore it no longer uses Raffles' services. In the meantime, Raffles has set up campuses in a number of countries including China, Mongolia and India, where it services a large number of students. Of course, it also still operates in Singapore. Raffles' aim is to use Australia as not only a finishing school but also a place where students from the various campuses can come and spend a year. It will focus initially on a number of courses, including design and architecture and related areas, which is of great interest around the world, including Australia. This signals that Raffles perceives, correctly so, that the regulatory system in Australia for the approvals of universities, the status of universities and their curricula, is a benchmark accepted around the world. It is a benchmark that many students around the world not only accept but seek to attain.

It is therefore very important for us to facilitate Raffles University developing a campus in Western Australia. It has chosen Midland for a variety of reasons. One is the location, but it also perceives the old railway workshops, which have been underutilised in recent years, as a suitable place to build a long-term campus. It will be a big undertaking. Anyone familiar with the railway workshops will know that they will require substantial investment to be turned into a university. Raffles also plans to establish additional buildings, including housing accommodation relating to the university. The previous member mentioned a sum of \$300 million; I have heard the figure of \$200 million quoted, which is a substantial investment in the area of Midland. Furthermore, Raffles plans to use its university as a base to expand not only its domestic but also its international student numbers. It will be a major investment in Midland, a major investment in the university system, and a major capital investment in Western Australia. It will also act as a second or third tier to the university system in Western Australia, adding to its diversity and strength.

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It is therefore a project very much to support. The Raffles people want to get going, but they know that they are here for the long term. They have to get the place right, they have to get the structure correct and they have to get the legislation upon which their university will be based correct. I urge members of the house to support the bill. I encourage them to learn about the Raffles project and support it because it will be a good fillip for the state and for the education system.