



Nicola Roxon MP Federal Labor
Member for Gellibrand

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	29
Date Received	1-6-06
Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
P.O. Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

31 May 2006

Dear Secretary,

Submission to the Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education

I would like to make a brief submission relating to the schools subsidy for students to come to Canberra – and the way it impacts on my electorate.

You will see that my concerns affect both the ability of students in my region to get a good understanding of our system of government and, because of the ethnic diversity of my area, also have a particular impact on the newly arrived refugee and immigrant communities.

I have strong concerns about the access to and adequacy of funding for school visits to the Federal Parliament. I believe the formula used needs to be reviewed.

In particular, the 1000 kilometre limit for receiving assistance to travel to Canberra means that all of metropolitan Melbourne misses out on receiving this subsidy, despite the trip being over seven hours drive from Melbourne. The distance means the trip must be an overnight one – with all the attendant expenses this involves. This is in contrast to students coming from Sydney who can (if pushed) make this trip in a day.

In recent times it has been drawn to my attention that many of my local schools have stopped coming to Canberra because students from my electorate of Gellibrand simply cannot afford to attend a school trip to Canberra.

Whilst I support this subsidy enabling remote schools to be able to visit the nation's capital however I feel that the scheme ought to be extended to include a means tested portion for schools under 1000km from Canberra.

Low income families in my electorate are already stretched by the costs of education. Schools do not want to further burden families with the cost of expensive school trips. I know specifically of four schools, but am aware there are many more, in my electorate who have been unable to offer a Canberra excursion due to the cost to families.

Electorate Office

204 Nicholson Street
Footscray, Victoria 3011

Telephone (03) 9687 7355
Facsimile (03) 9689 6523

Canberra Office

Parliament House
Canberra, Act 2600

Telephone (02) 6277 2039
Facsimile (02) 6277 8405

e-mail Nicola.Roxon.MP@aph.gov.au



This means that students in my area miss out on the inspiration and understanding that is gained from a visit to Canberra and this impacts upon their general interest in our system of government – this affects all of us who want our citizens of the future to be engaged, well informed and participating community members.

In addition, I have a large community of newly arrived migrants and refugees in my electorate of Gellibrand and it is particularly important for their children to have the opportunity to experience first hand the concepts of parliament, democracy and civic life, however these are exactly the families in my electorate who miss out.

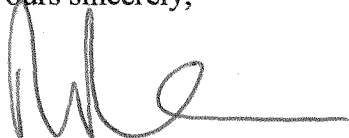
The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) provides a wonderful service and I have seen the way children's eyes light up when they role play mock parliaments etc. Obviously, though, this service primarily benefits those who are able to come to Canberra. Surely we want kids from the Western suburbs of Melbourne or refugees children from the Sudan or Iraq to also feel the excitement and see the potential of living in a robust democracy?

I urge the inquiry to consider options that would look to providing some subsidy assistance on a means test basis and also to consider other ways of making the great services of the PEO more accessible – both so it can service more of the schools who do make it to Canberra and perhaps, for example, via increased funding for the PEO to provide outreach services.

Any options that may give less well off children the opportunity to experience the benefits of a trip to Canberra would be welcome.

I would be happy to present more information to the Committee if it is of assistance and am sure that, if the inquiry is taking evidence around the country, my local schools would be delighted to discuss their views with you further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nicola Roxon', written over a horizontal line.

Nicola Roxon MP
Federal Member for Gellibrand