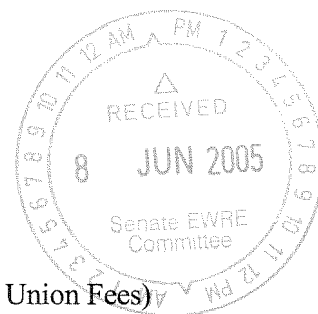


Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



RE: Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees)
Bill 2005

To Whom it may concern,
I have serious misgivings about this bill and urge the enquiry to dismiss the bill.

The abolition of up front union fees has a very good chance of crippling student unions. The unions are important because:

Unions run most sport facilities at university level. These may have to shut down. It seems obvious that this would be a disaster. These facilities are essential for the health of the university communities, as any rational person must acknowledge, an academic life is not a very active one and obesity is already a problem for Australia and Australians. Furthermore it is often through sports that universities get an international profile. With US uni fees going down and Australian fees going up because of local pressures as well s currency fluctuations, Australian Unis need every bit of prestige they can get in order to remain competitive.

Many student run art galleries and cultural institutions are paid for only by union fees. These are essential to the education of people studying the fine arts. If they go, then education will be severely compromised.

Student unions run bus services. In cities already choked with traffic do we really need these services to vanish?

Student unions educate the student population on health risks and offer counselling services for young people who are at greater risk of mental health problems than most of the population. The student unions therefore provide an essential safety net.

Most importantly student unions sometimes represent the only check and balance to the education system. It must be remembered that students are central to university life and cannot be forgotten. Students are already under represented in faculty and university decision making processes. Voluntary student membership to the union will not change the fact that students are still represented (through the unions) in these committees, but it does mean that the students that are represented will be only a select few rather than the entire cross section of the student population.

I question the democratic premise of this amendment. If it is essential that ALL AUSTRALIANS VOTE, then surely all students should be t least *allowed* to vote (with out having to pay especially for the privilege.) for representatives at university level. I am concerned that the unions may turn into a club for the privileged few under VSU.

I am concerned for the motivation for this bill. Apparently the government wishes to suppress the democratic voice of the student population. If so, then why is our government scared of student unions? - If students don't generally vote for the government, it is likely that this is because students don't feel that the government represents their needs. If this is so, then there is even more reason to have a student union to protect their interests, after all, if the government doesn't care for students, who will?

Please stop this bill.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Golembiewski
Australian citizen and student.