



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

National Disability Insurance Scheme

SPEECH

Monday, 28 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Neumann, Shayne, MP

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Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (21:05): I am aggrieved at the attitude of the federal coalition parties in Canberra and to the attitude of the state LNP government in Queensland with respect to disabilities and disability services. For nearly 12 years as the demand for disability services grew and as disability pensioners struggled with the cost of living, the coalition here in Canberra ignored them. There was inadequate funding for disability services, they ignored the inadequacy of the disability support pension, and they sat on their hands as the demand for disability services increased. In fact, Commonwealth expenditure in relation to disability funding grew at a measly 1.8 per cent a year less than inflation. In fact, funding went backwards in real terms. Even in the last federal election they left out 158,000 students with disabilities and their families in their education card policy. Under the previous coalition government, people with disabilities had to wait up to a year to get help in terms of work through disability employment services. Even then they had their access to their pension reviewed.

So the number of people on disability pensions kept growing and growing under the coalition's Welfare to Work changes. Then it comes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, where they have had every position possible—an 'aspirational' policy; that is what the Leader of the Opposition described it as. Then we had the shadow Treasurer rejecting the idea of a 'constructive cooperation' approach on a National Disability Insurance Scheme and saying he was not going to raise expectations and then not deliver, describing a billion dollars in the budget for a National Disability Insurance Scheme, kick-starting it a year earlier than was in the Productivity Commission report, as a 'cruel hoax'.

Then we had the Leader of the Opposition, in an extraordinary press conference outside of Parliament House, have about four different positions with respect to the National Disability Insurance Scheme; so much so that he was asked whether he had had an epiphany—so much was his position different from what he was saying when he was discussing the issue on the Pollie Pedal. Then, channelling his famous interview with Kerry O'Brien, he said:

Look, I was exhausted and emotional as you can imagine on the last day of the Pollie Pedal.

He was describing why his views were different in the press conference he was having at the doorstep of Parliament House from what they were previously.

In that particular interview with the journalist he said it was important to stick to the Productivity Commission's timetable—in other words, not agreeing to bring the funding forward a year, as we have done in this budget. Then, part way through those interviews, he describes it and goes on to say that it should be 2020—a time when the budget would get back to surplus—and one per cent of GDP, a rough-and-ready definition as a strong surplus at the time. Incredulous were the journalists at the time, so much so that Senator Mitch Fifield actually had to pick up the pieces, come behind and say that the coalition supported the roadmap set out by the Productivity Commission. So the coalition has had every position possible.

But it does not stop there. At a state level, the then shadow Minister for Disabilities, Tracy Davis, celebrating the valuable contribution Queenslanders with disabilities make to our community, on 3 December came out and said:

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is a vision for providing increased independence and participation for people with disabilities, but there needs to be an effort made within the existing system as well.

Then the LNP at the state level promised, from what they said on their website on 17 March 2012, that they were going to deliver real support for Queenslanders living with a disability and their families and carers. This is what they said:

The LNP also supports the intent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme ... and we will work with other jurisdictions and ... stakeholders to ensure that this scheme is funded and has a particular focus on regional and rural Queenslanders with a disability.

When the Together Queensland union actually asked the LNP about this, they said on three occasions in answers to very specific questions from the Together Queensland union that the LNP supports a National Disability Insurance Scheme. In fact, one of those questions was:

Will you commit to resourcing Disability Services based on identified client needs?

And they said:

The LNP is committed to a Disability Services scheme where the needs of the client are the focus.

They make it plain:

The LNP supports the establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme ...

... the LNP supports a National Disability Insurance Scheme ...

They keep saying it and saying it and saying it. Then, when we delivered \$1 billion in the budget for it and said that the states had to contribute only \$288 million—in fact, we are putting up 78 per cent of the money—they criticised us about it, saying they are not going to put forward any money towards it. In fact, they say they are going to have to pay down what they describe as Queensland's 'massive debt', which is a greater priority. In Queensland, historically the per capita basis of funding for people with disability is only \$5,830, while Victoria's is \$8,378. So, historically, neither side of politics has done particularly well in Queensland in relation to this.

When it comes to this issue, Campbell Newman is resisting it—it is quite clear. In fact, he attacked us when we put forward the \$1 billion commitment, saying that it would go towards bureaucracy and a computer system. He made fun of it, actually, despite the fact that the *Courier Mail* said that it was important. But the Leader of the Opposition in Queensland, Annastacia Palaszczuk, really belled the cat very well. With our scheme, on 1 July 2013, we are going to have 10,000 Australians covered and 20,000 will be covered by 2014-15. She said that, if Mr Newman and the LNP government in Queensland do not come to the party, 'not one of those 20,000 people will be a Queenslander'. So I call on them to take steps. Fiona Anderson of the Every Australian Counts organisation made the point in an article appearing on her website on 12 April:

BEFORE the state election, Campbell Newman said: 'We will ensure Queenslanders with a disability get a fair go from the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.'

But not if they do not come to the party. As she said:

But the fair go for Queenslanders is off to a shaky start, with uncertainty about Queensland's participation in the NDIS ...

It is important that we give lifetime care for people and roll this out. I call on the LNP government in Queensland to take steps to put aside the partisan politics around the National Disability Insurance Scheme, approach this in a bipartisan fashion and cooperate. We think it is particularly important.

NDIS advisory group member Fran Vickery made this point very clearly recently. She said that the NDIS would not replace disability pensions or carers allowance. She also urged state governments not to decrease the funding of disability services because of the federal government's NDIS. She said:

It will take all levels of government to help the disabled with services.

I agree entirely. In fact, if you want to put aside even decency, humanity and compassion, it is quite clear. According to the Productivity Commission, if we had more people with disability in employment by 2050 we would raise \$32 billion into the Australian economy every year. If you were an economic rationalist, you would support a national disability insurance scheme in any event.

A lot of people in my local area are supporting it. Recently, the Minister for Disability Reform, Jenny Macklin, came to Ipswich to attend Focal Extended. There are a lot of local advocates for this in my area, including principals and deputy principals from special schools including Ipswich Special School, Ipswich West Special School and Claremont Special School, and Peter and Linda Tully, who are local advocates for it. In fact, in the Ipswich community they are the real advocates for it because they are the local coordinators of the Queenslanders

with Disability Network. They have been terrific with the support of their local church, Catalyst Church, and Ipswich City Council. I met with them on Friday and they urged me to do everything I possibly could to make speeches and influence this matter, and they would advocate the program with the new local state LNP members. It is important that they come to the party as well.

Like many Queenslanders, I am concerned about the Queensland government's attitude to this. It is important they play their part. We are advocating that Ipswich be one of the four sites. It is ideal, as the Minister for Disability Reform has said, that we have a place like Ipswich involved in this process. But the people of Ipswich will not get one of the first launch sites if the LNP government in Queensland do not come to the party and cooperate. I urge them to do so. Our funding is a sign of good faith to all the states and territories, including Queensland, to say we are eager and willing to be partners in reform. We want them to work cooperatively with us. We do not want them to play ducks and drakes on this issue. We put money on the table. We want them to come to the party and we want them to see sense and fulfil the commitments they made in the last state election.