



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Food Allergies

SPEECH

Monday, 26 May 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (11:56): I said with DisabilityCare, and particularly with this issue, that whilst I can empathise with the family—in this case the member for Chisolm and her son—and whilst I can empathise with somebody whose child is disabled, I do not live it every day. I do not live it every moment of the day. I felt for the member for Hasluck when he was saying to this chamber that as a teacher he had to be on top of his task with regard to a child with an allergy. I cannot imagine what it is like to be a teacher these days, with the figures you have just heard from each of the speakers—one in 10 children may be affected, one in 10 babies, one in 20 young people, one in 20 adults. These have been described as large numbers. No, these are gargantuan numbers. These are very large numbers of people.

The reason I have chosen to speak on this motion today is this: I have no idea why in just my generation—our generation, for most of the people in this room, except for some of the beautiful young ones—this phenomenon has come upon us like a creeping cancer. So I ask myself questions. What is it? Is it the food chain? Is it something different that we are doing today that our parents did not do? The member who spoke previously gave the example of a mother who had many allergies and whose child had an allergy. Therefore, it was generational. But we have many occasions now where both parents, and their generations before them, did not have any allergies to any of these foods. So that is a question. At least I have a doctor beside me who is nodding his head.

I say again: what is the question? What are we doing? Why have we got, even, cancer rates higher in this generation than before? I can reason that away by saying that in previous generations we did not know all the things we know now. We did not know children were suffering. Perhaps I could reason away and say we did not know they were suffering with an allergy. They just had to burst their way through it. Some did and some did not. We only came to that place where we found the children who did not grow out of it, as has been suggested here, by having more of the same.

As a member of parliament, I had a staff member who was allergic not to nuts but to one particular nut. She carried an EpiPen. In the fullness of time, after she left my care, she had an episode because in the food that she was eating there was a trace of that particular nut and she ended up in Canberra Hospital. Even with the EpiPen, she still ended up in Canberra Hospital. Families live with that knowledge. Mums, dads, families and individuals just have to get on, accept and know that it is ever present.

I am sorry I did not hear the member for Chisholm's address but I gleaned from the other remarks that she has been directly in that position herself and having to send her son out into a community that has not got that knowledge and where he was not protected totally and had to be responsible for himself at every moment of the day. Whenever there was food around, he had to be aware.

You can imagine today what it is like at a kid's party. Today at a kid's party—I know it was only 100s and 1000s on bread and butter when we were kids—there would be a huge amount of food that they have to protect themselves from. It is not an easy question.

I hope that the new research funds that the government are putting in place will have some long-term effect for this to be resolved. But, like all of the rest of you, I have a question: how did we get to this place?