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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Child Care

SPEECH

Tuesday, 19 November 2013

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Questioner
Speaker Owens, Julie, MP

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Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (15:56): I have to ask whether any of the speakers on the government side actually realise they are in government. What we have heard from them today, again, and what we have heard for the last week-and-a-half in this parliament, is the constant carry-on about this side of politics. The Liberal Party is now in government. When you are in government you do not get to do what you did in opposition. You do not get to stand up here and define the problem as you see it and blame the other side. I understand that in the first month of government you try to rewrite history but, having been in opposition for six years, I would think you would want to start writing history of your own.

Time in government can be very short. You might get three years; you might get six years. But, for God's sake, do not waste it trying to rewrite history. It is your opportunity today to write your own history and have an impact on families. If you believe what you are saying here, that child care was such a disaster for the last six years, then why on earth was the shadow minister sitting on the end of chair taking a salary and spending six months developing terms of reference so that she could undertake a year-long review? If things are so bad in the childcare sector that you say it is an emergency then why don't you act like there is one?

Do not come in here and try to rewrite history. Write your own. If what you are saying is true, and families need you, then work for them. Do not play the politics—do the job of government. Families do, as my colleague said, sometimes live from week to week. But they also make choices about their life. They make choices about which one of them works and for how many hours. They consider the cost of child care. They make all sorts of decisions about how they live their lives. To put them in a position where statements are made before an election and then after an election they are left in a position of uncertainty for over a year is nothing less than cruel.

The shadow minister referred to what happens to investment in those terms, but also you put families under incredible strain. Families who have children know that next year and the year after they will be applying for childcare services but they do not know what is going to happen because this government, in spite of this terrible 'emergency' that they saw for six years in opposition, thought the appropriate response was to spend six months developing terms of reference and then have a one-year review.

I know the Prime Minister said he was going to slow the pace of government but this is catatonic. Before the election we had a mishmash of quite contradictory promises. Nobody could make sense of this. 'An increase in flexibility and accessibility'—a great aspiration and I am sure it is an aspiration, certainly for the next year. 'New funding for nannies and au pairs'; 'a capping of places'—it is hard to imagine how capping places does not put the price up, by the way; 'not means testing for the rebate'; and 'dropping standards'. It is an interesting collection of promises.

What we hear now from this government is that there is a new one which is that they will not increase the funding. Keeping the funding the same is an effective cut. But let us leave that side. They are not increasing the funding, but they are increasing flexibility and accessibility—no new funding but, presumably, more places, different places, different hours. They are providing funding for nannies and au pairs, but no new funding—no new funding but new funding for nannies. It has to come from somewhere, so where does it come from? Which families who currently receive assistance for child care will lose it because the government are going to give more money to some? More money to some and no additional funding means cuts—it seems perfectly obvious.

They are capping the number of places. No additional funding, more money for nannies and no additional places—it does not make any sense. Which person who gets childcare assistance now is going to lose their childcare place because the government are going to give more to others? It is really time they came clean. Families need certainty in the same way that business does. It is no different; they need certainty. It is time the government gave it to them.