



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Women's Infolink; Internet Access

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt— ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (9.59 a.m.), by leave: In 1995 the Goss Labor Government initiated an innovative strategy designed to assist women to gain a greater understanding of and have greater access to information technology—a strategy designed to ensure equity for women, to encourage education and training for women and to support women to re-enter the work force, to get jobs and to keep jobs. The Women and Information Technology Strategy was a significant milestone for Queensland women. Women were encouraged to embrace new technology with free Internet access and free Internet tutorials made available at the Mary Street, Brisbane premises of Women's Infolink.

Although the strategy was a Labor Government initiative, when the coalition Government came to office it was happy to accept it as its own and, amidst much fanfare, it launched Phase 2 of the strategy, public Internet access. In fact, the former Leader of the Liberal Party made much of her personal commitment to this service, proclaiming it as an impressive new initiative. Sadly, this commitment, like many other commitments made by the coalition Government, was quickly neglected and soon forgotten. The previous Minister for Women's Affairs demonstrated a lack of interest in her portfolio responsibilities and a failure to follow up on important initiatives.

It was a great disappointment to me when I visited Women's Infolink on taking office to find that the public Internet access and Internet tutorials were no longer available. The computers used for Internet access were lying dormant and the computer area was deserted.

Mrs SHELDON: I rise to a point of order. That information is incorrect and a misrepresentation. I take offence at it and I ask for it to be withdrawn. The Minister should at least stick to the truth. I ask for those comments to be withdrawn.

Ms SPENCE: I withdraw. The service had been clearly neglected. This was a successful Goss Government initiative that had attracted many users since it began operating and was growing in popularity by the month. This important initiative failed because there was no genuine commitment on behalf of the former Minister for Women's Affairs or her colleagues to improve women's education, training and employment opportunities. Instead of using up-to-date technology, second-hand 486 computers were installed; the outdated Windows 3.1 was used; there was only one modem connection to the Internet; and the computers were not year 2000 compliant. Not surprisingly, the program had been unreliable and inefficient since it was launched. Although clients continued to come in, they were turned away and nothing was done to fix the problem. Public access to the Internet was available only intermittently and has been abandoned completely since 2 June.

We have inherited shoddy equipment and now have many disappointed women who do not have the access that they were promised by the former Government. We had a coalition Government that paid lip-service to the needs of women. Women were encouraged to embrace technology but were given antiquated means of doing so. The Labor Government is committed to jobs and to jobs for women. We are committed to assisting women to increase their skills in the important area of information technology.

As the Minister responsible for women's policy, I have taken steps to ensure that this abysmal situation is rectified. Internet tutorials and access will be up and running within two weeks. New

computers have been purchased, all of which will have the relevant program licences, up-to-date software and will be year 2000 compliant. Finally, because we are mindful of the public purse, the computers previously used will be established with keyboarding and word processing tutorial packages. During this term we will also introduce innovative programs to ensure that women in regional Queensland have similar opportunities to improve their skills in this area and so increase their opportunities for participation in the work force.

Unlike the previous Government, the Labor Government is committed to the women of Queensland and will deliver up-to-date technology to advance their opportunities.
