



Speech by

Mr K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard 18 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (3.25 p.m.): I wish to direct my comments to the Treasurer whom I note is present in the Chamber. I refer to a particularly embarrassing situation for the Government and for us as parliamentarians. I am talking about means tested electricity concessions for people using life support systems, such as oxygen concentrators and kidney dialysis machines.

In the coalition Government's Budget it was announced that electricity concessions would be available on a means tested basis for people who were using oxygen concentrators and kidney dialysis machines, especially people with disabilities. After the election I wrote to the Minister for Families and to the Minister for Mines and Energy regarding these concessions. In early August I received a letter from the Minister for Mines and Energy. I am prepared to table this letter for the Treasurer's information. The letter reads—

"Thank you for your letter of 7 July 1998 on behalf of ... requesting assistance with costs for electricity consumed in operating her husband's home-based life support system."

The next paragraph is extremely important. One can see why it causes embarrassment to this new Government. It reads—

"Clearly the cost of electricity for life support systems is an added burden to those people who rely on them and electricity concessions are available for low income, seriously ill people on life support systems. Concessions of up to \$16.00 per month per machine for oxygen concentrators and \$9.70 per month per machine for kidney dialysis machines are available to offset the cost of operating these machines."

In early August we have a commitment from the former coalition Government in its Budget that it would allow these electricity concessions. Now we have the Minister for Mines and Energy saying that these concessions are available. As far as I am concerned, that amounts to a commitment by the present Government.

However, I wrote to the Department of Families, the department which looks after these concessions, but I did not receive a reply. I contacted the Department of Families and the department tells me that the ALP Government has removed those concessions in the present Budget and will not provide those concessions. Regardless of the wisdom of this action, we have a situation where the previous Government agreed that these concessions would be available. We also have a Minister writing to me and telling me, "Yes, these concessions are available. These are the concessions which will be provided." We then have the Department of Families saying, "No, we will not provide these concessions under the new Budget."

I wanted an answer from the Minister. Finally, I received an answer from the Minister in the last few days. In her letter the Minister says—

"The proposed concession referred to ... was announced by the previous Government."

The Minister admits that the concession was announced by the previous Government. However, she goes on to say—

"This matter, however, is currently under consideration by the Labor Government."

I say to the Treasurer that the previous Government gave a commitment in this matter and allowed for it in its Budget. The Treasurer has now removed these concessions from his Budget. However, the Minister for Mines and Energy has written to me and the lady concerned and said that the concessions are available. We find ourselves in the situation where the Department of Families is saying, "We are not going to give you these concessions. This lady will not get these concessions." As far as the Minister for Families is concerned, this matter is now under consideration by the Labor Government.

I say to the Treasurer that, morally, we all have a commitment. If it is the situation that the Minister for Mines and Energy has agreed to these concessions, and if it is the situation that the coalition Government announced these concessions in its Budget, and if it is the situation that the Treasurer has removed these concessions, I believe that somehow or other he has to fund them.

There is another situation that the Treasurer must look at as far as the Department of Families is concerned. When the Miles Neighbourhood Centre was being opened, an announcement was made that another five neighbourhood centres would be built. When the coalition took power in February 1996 we found that 10 neighbourhood centres were to be built. The situation of neighbourhood centres was looked at and reviewed and it was decided that 10 would be built. The coalition Government selected the first five. I believe I acted very fairly in this matter. A centre was to be constructed in Acacia Ridge. I know that the former member, Len Ardill, was always very appreciative of what we did at Acacia Ridge. The coalition was also going to build one at Nambour. We also pushed very hard for a centre at Whitsunday.

Some of those centres have now been finalised. The Minister for Families has announced that another five neighbourhood centres will be built. I assume that the five neighbourhood centres recently announced form part of the original 10. However, the Budget does not stipulate that these are five new neighbourhood centres. The Budget reads as if the five new centres are really the old five centres. The Budget also reads as if the funding provided is the funding that was allocated to build the original five centres. If the Minister and the department were making an announcement at the Miles Neighbourhood Centre and saying that this Government was building another five centres, they would have to be fair dinkum—the money must be there for an extra five centres. It must be that a further 10 neighbourhood centres will be built. I believe that those 10 centres must include those that we inherited in February 1996. The decision to build those centres followed a review by the previous ALP Government. I hope that politicisation is not going to enter this issue, so that another five centres are decided upon—a politically expedient five. Those 10 neighbourhood centres should be completed.

I also put in a strong word for a respite centre to be built in the Beaudesert area. The Treasurer and his Ipswich electorate received a great advantage from our decision to close down the Challinor Centre for people with disabilities and to build a university.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mr LINGARD: If we had not made those decisions, Ipswich would have lost that university—especially after the member told the university senate that he would offer extra places only if they made a decision to build the university at the railway yards. That was a disgraceful decision for that former Education Minister to make. He knows full well that if we had allowed Challinor to stay at the railway centre, Ipswich would not be getting that university. But because we made the decision to close down the Challinor Centre, Ipswich will get a university on that site.

Some of the money that was to assist people with disabilities was to be used to build a respite centre in the Beaudesert area. For a long time, both the Minister for Education and the Minister for Families in the Goss Government played politics with that respite centre. The money to build the centre was to come from the Department of Works. The Department of Families was to provide the operational costs. That respite centre is certainly needed by people with disabilities in the Beaudesert area. It is something that I hope this ALP Government does not push into the background.

I turn now to the issue of a Jimboomba high school, in which the Treasurer was very much involved when he was the Minister for Education. A school was always to be built in the northern part of the Beaudesert Shire to take some of the population from the Beaudesert State High School, which now has 1,600 students. The decision to build a high school in the northern part of the shire was changed from Jimboomba to Flagstone by this Treasurer when he was the Minister for Education. I always disagreed with that decision. But regardless of my disagreement, no high school is forthcoming for the northern part of Beaudesert. So we have a high school at Beaudesert with over 1,600 students. That is a rural school—

Mr Schwarten: Why didn't you build one while you were in Government?

Mr LINGARD: We built the one at Tamborine. The decision on the Jimboomba one was to be made in September. The previous Minister had always agreed that a decision would be made. The decision on whether or not it is to be built, and where it is to be built, must be made. The present Minister for Education is not agreeing to meet with people in the Jimboomba/Beaudesert area, and he is not agreeing to make a decision on a high school for the northern part of the Beaudesert Shire.

I ask the Treasurer to consider those electricity concessions. We really have got ourselves into an embarrassing situation, and this Government has got itself in an embarrassing situation, especially now that I am tabling the letter from the Minister for Mines and Energy, in which he agrees that those concessions are available, and the letter from the Minister for Families, in which she says that they are not available.
