



Speech by

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JOB NETWORK

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (11.55 a.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, before I deal with my matter of public importance I must say that this is the first time that I have had the opportunity to congratulate you on your election to the position of Chairman of Committees. I ask that you pass on to the Speaker my congratulations on his election to high office. I also congratulate the Speaker and you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on the excellent way in which you conducted the proceedings of the House during the previous sittings. I take this opportunity to thank the people of Kurwongbah for their support in the recent State election. It is with great pride and honour that I take my place in this Assembly as their representative. I will strive to meet their expectations and serve my local community to the best of my ability.

In serving my local community, I know that the most pressing issue is unemployment. When I was elected during the by-election in May last year, unemployment was the most pressing issue. Today it still is. I put together a range of strategies because I believed that, locally, I could take some small measures to address unemployment in my area. I am proud to say that I have produced a "Buy in Kurwongbah" guide. That local business directory was distributed to all households in my electorate asking locals to support local business in an effort to create local jobs.

I am honoured and proud to be a member of the Beattie Labor Government, which is obsessed about jobs. Job creation programs and strategies have been put in place by our leader, Mr Beattie, for this Government. However, that is only one side of the equation, which leads me to my matter of public importance. It is well and good and wonderful to create jobs, but under the Howard Government's Job Network scheme, people are being denied access to job vacancies. The inequality of the Federal Government's new Job Network is that it is not for all job seekers.

On 30 April this year, the Federal Government ended a 50-year tradition of providing a free employment service to all Australians. The Job Network scheme, which was introduced on 1 May, has privatised employment services and effectively placed a bounty on the head of every unemployed person with the aim of private firms making a profit out of the unemployed. In those 50 years up to 30 April, the CES—which has now been abolished—provided a universal scheme for job access. When I moved to Brisbane to attend university, I used the CES, which was able to place me in employment even though I was a full-time student.

However, the changed circumstances mean that not all people are able to access the services of the new scheme. It is not profitable for these private agencies to deal with people who are not registered as unemployed, because they do not get paid by the Government to place them in employment. Otherwise known as the ineligible, this group, which I believe comprises over 400,000 people across Australia, mostly includes women whose husbands are in paid employment, full-time students or those seeking to upgrade or change their employment. Since the system has come into place, people have contacted my office in total and utter frustration because they cannot access the jobs market. I know that many other members have shared that same experience.

I want to outline some of the inequities that have been brought to my attention. Recently, I received a plea from one man to do all that I could to assist him to access the jobs market. He lost his job of 30 years and, because of his age, he decided to take the first job that came along, which was a low-paid job. He thought that he would be able to then access the Job Network to gain a job that was more suitable to his skills and, of course, a higher paid job reflecting his high level of skills. He told me

that he also took that low-paid job because he was too proud to take social security. He had never received unemployment benefits in his life. When he went to seek help he was deemed ineligible by Centrelink because he has a job. Through a local employment agency, he found a job on its books that would have suited his skills. The agency registered him but he heard nothing further back about the job. He can now only glean that, because he was ineligible and because that agency would not be paid for placing him, he was effectively shut out of the system.

I have heard numerous examples from married women who, in good faith, have accessed the computers through the local Strathpine Centrelink or through the Internet at home to keep up to date with what jobs are available. They find out which agency those jobs are with, they then contact the agency—and in some cases that means driving or travelling to other parts of Brisbane to register—and then they hear nothing back. About two weeks ago, one woman told me that, finally, someone from Employment National—and she did not name which office—was honest enough to tell her that, because her husband worked she was ineligible and that because she did not have a social security number she would never get a placement, and that she was really wasting her time. She then asked, "How on earth am I going to get a job?" This officer said, "To be honest, all you can do is check the job vacancies in the newspaper or go door to door."

We have had the recently publicised example of a young woman in my electorate who got the double whammy. The double whammy is that, because she is under the age of 25, she is now caught up in the arrangements relating to the Common Youth Allowance. That Common Youth Allowance is now means tested on her parents' income. Even though she lives away from home and is presently unemployed, because of her parents' income she is deemed ineligible. So her double whammy is that she not only no longer receives benefits but also she is ineligible to access that jobs market.

A black hole has been created for a huge section of our community who are trying to access jobs. As a further example, I refer to an article in yesterday's Courier-Mail headed "Rules relaxed to aid Job Network". The article states that the Federal Minister for Employment, Dr Kemp—

"... this week will announce major changes to the Job Network aimed at shoring up financially ailing job agencies."

That is one part of the equation. However, the other part is the expected announcement by the Minister of a special payment to help these agencies find work for the estimated 400,000 job seekers who do not attract a fee for job placement because they are not on social security benefits.

The Courier-Mail editorial also addressed the faults of the Job Network system and called for them to be fixed. I call on the Federal Minister for Employment to urgently scrap the whole scheme and go back to the universal scheme we had under the CES. I feel that there have been inequities and unfairness across-the-board and that too many people have been denied access to the jobs market.
