



Speech by

LINDA LAVARCH

STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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PERSONS CONVICTED OF OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (6.31 p.m.): I am delighted to rise to support the amended motion moved by the shadow Attorney-General, the member for Warwick, and seconded by the Attorney-General, the Honourable Matt Foley. The message that this sends to the electorate is a positive one. It is a message of our commitment in this House, working together for the protection of children. I hope that this occasion is noted for the records as showing a spirit of cooperation that has been demonstrated thus far.

However, I have a confession to make. When I read the motion that was moved this morning by the member for Warwick, two things sprung to mind. Firstly, the motion as originally worded, and which still forms part of the amended motion, dealt only with children. But there is another section of our community who are just as vulnerable as children, that is, people with intellectual disabilities, and perhaps the scope should be expanded. I am confident that, when the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care reviews the situation, she will broaden the scope to encompass those people who have intellectual disabilities.

The other thought I had was that the motion, whilst dressed as seeking to protect children, is only couched in terms of punishment of the convicted offender. I honestly believe that if our first and foremost concern is the protection of children, then our intent should be about protecting children. That is why I believe that the amended motion is to be applauded, because the main objective of that motion is the need to prevent unsuitable persons from gaining child-related employment. That must stay uppermost in our minds as legislators. Second to that is the furthering of the punishment of those convicted, which does not of itself protect our children. Whilst that is an important matter, it is a secondary matter.

I am willing to give the member for Warwick the benefit of the doubt but, from listening to his contribution tonight, it seems to me that it is still very much slanted towards punishment and not protection. It may well be that he believes that the punishment is protection. I hope that he has another look at it and has a rethink about protection, because I would like to convince him that punishment of itself is not protection for our children.

Mr Springborg: That is a fair point. I believe that the threat of punishment could be a deterrent to those people, as you said, who would try to put themselves in that environment. So therefore, protecting our children is the basis of the logic behind it.

Mrs LAVARCH: Yes. And following on from that, would the member then agree with me that the protection side is stopping them from gaining access to children in the first place, or being in a position where they are able to be in the company of children?

Mr Springborg: That's true.

Mrs LAVARCH: There have been numerous reports into paedophilia. They have given us insight into the minds or the cunning of paedophiles, but none of those reports has given us constructive suggestions on where to go. I believe that we have come a long way over the past year. The Child Protection Act contains provisions for criminal history checks of carers or prospective carers. Last session, members debated the Family Services Act, which now contains provisions for criminal checks of employees and prospective employees of the Family Services Department. The Road Transport Reform Act contains provisions for history checks for lollipop ladies and men—road safety officers.