



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 29 May 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10 a.m.), by leave: Today I have written to the federal Minister for Family and Community Services, Amanda Vanstone, seeking an urgent assurance that the Howard-Costello government will not walk away from its commitment to Australians with disabilities. I am seeking an explanation from the minister for a \$248.9 million black hole in the budget.

It appears that the federal government has delivered an inflated budget surplus at the expense of Australians with disabilities. I have written to the federal government because it has breached its agreement to maintain funding at \$501 million under the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement to address unmet needs. If the federal government fails to live up to its commitment, then the impact on the Queensland budget would be substantial. Queensland would be facing the bleak choice of either cutting services or finding an additional \$18.3 million over the 2002-03 and 2003-04 years to make up the shortfall.

Either the Howard government is living up to its reputation as being mean and tricky by deceiving Australians with a disability or they are hiding behind false claims of being successful economic managers and, in fact, have a \$248.9 million black hole in the budget. Either way, they must not be allowed to blatantly deceive some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Queensland, as with all other states, has a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth for additional funds to address unmet need, specifically for people with a disability with ageing carers. Under this amending agreement signed by the Queensland minister on 18 July 2000, Queensland received \$9.1 million in 2000-01 and will receive an additional \$9.2 million in 2001-02 from the Commonwealth. To receive these funds, Queensland committed to an additional \$9 million in 2000-01 and a further additional \$9 million in 2001-02. The Beattie government committed the additional \$18 million to match the Commonwealth contributions on a recurrent basis, and this is built into the budget forward estimates for Disability Services Queensland. But there is a decline in the total funding to states and territories in 2002-03.

Discussions with officers from the Families and Community Services Department have confirmed that the recurrent expenditure to maintain the funds provided to address unmet need has not yet been appropriated by the Commonwealth government on a recurrent basis. This is not in line with the commitment given by the federal government at the meeting of all Commonwealth and state ministers in Wellington, New Zealand on 25 July 2000. Such a significant shift in funding would place considerable strain on the level of services the Queensland government can provide.

It is unacceptable for the federal government to try to walk away from its obligations and commitments. They are threatening a vulnerable group in our community. People with disabilities continue to need support, and at a time when we are significantly increasing funding for disabilities, this would be a severe setback.
