



Speech by

DIANNE REILLY

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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FEDERAL FUNDING, DISABILITY SERVICES

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (7.08 p.m.): Last night Australia was plunged into darkness. Peter Costello delivered a khaki budget and, to fund it, turned off the lights for tens of thousands of Australians. Almost 80,000 Australians with a disability will lose up to \$50 a fortnight in disability payments if forced into employment programs in a bid aimed at saving the federal government millions of dollars in welfare payouts. This cold-hearted, soulless and cynical federal government plans to pay for war off the backs of Australia's poor, sick and disabled. People like my brother, who has been on a disability pension for nearly 10 years, have had enough of being the scapegoats for every economic ill the government suffers. My brother Jim is 44 years old. He did not choose the degenerative, painful condition which afflicts him. He did not choose to give up his working life at the age of 34, forfeiting his independence, his right to earn and to accumulate wealth, his friends, his social circle and any hopes of finding a life partner and having a family of his own. No; ankylosing spondylitis chose him. This severe form of arthritis slowly fuses together the discs in his lower back, causing periods of chronic pain and debilitation. While he currently has more good days than bad days, eventually he will not be able to walk. But John Howard and Peter Costello want him to go back to work. Well, there is nothing my brother would love more than to go to work and to have a normal life. When his eligibility for the disability support pension came up for review recently, he asked for that permission, but the answer was no because his condition will only get worse, not better. But there is a question mark hanging over his head and there are many thousands of people like him who may not be considered by many to be severely disabled. After all, he can walk, talk, see, hear, read and drive. No doubt, the federal Treasurer, if he met my brother, would think, 'Here is a man who could work. Let us help him out.' But the question really is: what employer would employ him? What employer would be flexible and understanding enough to accept his inability to come to work for days or weeks at a time without warning? None, none, none! Not one! The reality is that it would take more than the willingness of the individual person with a disability to make employment a reality. The job and the employer need to be there, too. In this highly competitive job market, incapacitated, unreliable and often unqualified applicants just cannot cut it.

This policy is nothing but a disgusting, despicable exercise in money grabbing. It is despicable because it will raise the hopes and expectations of thousands of people who would love to get a job and live independently, but in reality have little chance of attaining that goal. It is disgusting because the money saved will be used to further repress and demonise those who arrive on our shores seeking safety and asylum. I would like to see the federal members on the Gold Coast come and explain this policy to my brother.
