



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES; CHILD ABUSE

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (6.31 p.m.): The first thing I would like to say in this debate tonight is that I think it is very sad that the opposition continues to pursue a witch-hunt against Peter Hollingworth. I think it has been publicly proven that he failed to take action on child abuse allegations, that he failed to provide the necessary support to child abuse victims when he should have and that he did not take appropriate actions and report certain matters to the police. However, he has paid the price for his actions. We have all learnt in the past decade that child abuse flourishes in darkness and cover-up.

I have always advocated total, open accountability and debate on this issue. For too long the Department of Families has been accused of having a secretive culture. Last year I announced in this House the establishment of an information gateway to ensure that the Department of Families becomes open and accountable. I also established a hotline to hear complaints. I also established an independent audit into all of our existing foster carers.

Queenslanders are not stupid. They know that the problems in our child protection system have been there for decades. They appreciate that this is the first time a government in this state has shown a willingness to confront these problems, to stare them down, to fix the system. If the opposition asks questions it has to be prepared to get some answers. Sometimes those answers are not ones that they particularly like.

I have no doubt that there are going to be more tough issues to confront in the months ahead as we see the CMC process work through. After the opposition loses interest in its political point scoring, the hard work of making the necessary changes to reform the system will go on and that will be done by our family service officers and our foster carers in this state.

The sad fact of this debate tonight is that the opposition is trying to make me a scapegoat for its own failure to say anything intelligent about child protection. Up until this point it tried to float the idea of a royal commission. That would grind to a halt any progress, any reforms, for a year or so. It would soak up money like a sponge; money that we would rather see go to Queensland's children would go to lawyers. It failed to make the case for a royal commission last time the parliament sat and it failed to get Queenslanders on side with this call. Does it know why? They are not on the opposition's side because they know that it has no policies in this area.

The opposition's next policy is that it thinks it would be a good idea for me to stand aside. It has not made a case for this in the debate tonight. The Leader of the Opposition could barely rally his troops to come along and listen to the debate. The Leader of the Liberal Party—and he is not in the chamber now; he could not even stay for the debate—could not even spend five minutes talking about Queensland's child protection system as he raved on about roads and Commonwealth-state spending. That is how much he really cares about reforming—about fixing—Queensland's child protection system.

Why does the opposition not do Queensland's children a favour and develop some real policies in this particular area? It has no policies; it has no ideas. If this Labor government fell under the bus and the amazing thing happened—that is, the opposition fell into government tonight—people would see recycled a former failed minister for families. No wonder this opposition has no policies in the area of child protection. Look at the contempt the Leader of the Opposition has shown Queenslanders by making the member for Beaudesert the shadow minister for families and disability services in this state.

A government member: Shame!

Ms SPENCE: It is a shame and Queenslanders deserve better from their opposition than this pathetic attempt of calling for a royal commission or calling for me to stand aside.