



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Care

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) (10.06 a.m.): Recently the federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, raised the hopes of many Queensland parents when he floated the idea of lifting the cap on child care places in Queensland. That proposition received an enthusiastic response from much of the local media. For example, the *Wynnum Herald* reported that bayside day care groups, which have 300 families on their waiting lists, welcomed the announcement. The *Albert and Logan News* said that hundreds of parents in Logan could get their children off the waiting list. Daisy Hill Family Day Care said the plan would be an enormous boost for parents. The state's leading provider of community non-profit children's services, the Creche and Kindergarten Association, applauded the move that was announced in the *Courier-Mail*. The Maroochy Family Day Care Scheme said that the demand for vacancies was huge and getting bigger all the time and, provided the government was willing to offer funding, scrapping the cap would benefit parents on the coast.

Since then there has been confusion about whether the federal government was serious about this proposal. It received no support from the federal Treasurer, who said—

Unfortunately in a budget, when you are dealing with people's taxes, you can't fund everybody's ... ideas.

The Prime Minister gave it no support. Let me repeat what the Prime Minister said when asked about the recent announcement. He said—

I want to make it clear that the issue of the capping of child-care places is a matter which I have invited the minister to bring forward for consideration.

The minister has some views on this matter and obviously, like all proposals that involve the expenditure of additional revenue, it will be carefully scrutinised.

The Treasurer has said that in a rigid budget process all proposals that ministers bring forward have to be carefully considered against competing priorities. That criterion will be applied to the proposal of the minister for children.

So, who do Queensland parents believe here—the minister, the federal Treasurer or the Prime Minister?

Child care is a critical issue for many Queensland families and it is a cruel hoax if the federal government has lifted parents' hopes without any intention of delivering. The Prime Minister or the minister must clarify this once and for all. If the federal government has no intention of lifting the cap on child care places, then they should say so. If they intend to lift the cap, then they should say so.

Queensland is desperately short of federally allocated child care places and the impact is being felt not just in urban areas but in our rural and regional centres. As at September 2003, the Australian government estimated that the total number of child care benefit approved places in Queensland from birth to 12 years available in centre based and home based care in Queensland was 123,894. We know from the ABS data as at June 2002 that there are approximately 38,100 requiring additional care, excluding preschool. Of the 70,000-odd family day care places allocated nationally, 19 per cent have been allocated to Queensland. That ignores the fact that 20 per cent of the estimated resident population of birth to 12-year-olds in Australia are living in Queensland.

I am writing to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs seeking an assurance that he is not playing a cruel joke on the hopes of Queensland families and I would urge the opposition to stand up for Queensland and ensure that this state gets a greater share of child care places.