



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Tuesday, 5 October 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Grandparents; Federal Election

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.03 a.m.): Mark Latham was right on the ball when he announced an extra \$144 million for grandparents caring for their grandchildren at last week's campaign launch in Brisbane. This is an issue that affects 27,000 grandparents around the country and an issue on which the federal government has ducked for cover and wiped its hands. It is not a new phenomenon that grandparents often become the full-time carers of their grandchildren, yet they often struggle to make ends meet on very limited incomes. I would like to ask those members on the opposite side of the House why they have not been lobbying their colleagues in Canberra to give grandparents a fair go.

The Queensland government has urged Prime Minister Howard to address this issue, and it was our Premier who placed this on the COAG agenda earlier this year. It is essential that the federal government recognises not only its responsibility when it comes to this very important issue but also the vital role that grandparents play in the lives of many children across Queensland. Mark Latham's announcement means that grandparents would be entitled, under a federal Labor government, to access financial assistance under current Commonwealth government arrangements. Labor's policy would see the introduction of a new grandparenting allowance which would provide eligible grandparents with an additional \$20 a week for each child in their care to assist with the additional costs of child rearing. This is on top of benefits they will receive as part of Labor's tax and better family payment plan and Labor's promise of one day of free child care per week for three- and four-year-olds.

Many grandparents struggle to survive while caring for their grandchildren on very limited incomes. There are grandparents in our community who go without meals so that their grandchildren can eat. They put off seeking medical advice for themselves because there is no money to pay for medicines. There is no money for the extras that growing children need, and many receive no support at all from the parents of their grandchildren. In fact in some cases, they are abandoned by their biological or natural parents. These grandparents have raised their own children and now they are being called on to raise their grandchildren. They need our support, and they deserve our support.

Despite Queensland's efforts to have the federal government face up to its responsibilities to our grandparents, the Howard government has only paid lip-service to the needs of grandparents and the children in their care. Mr Latham is clearly prepared to lead on the issues that are important to not only Queensland grandparents but also all grandparents who care for their grandchildren. This additional payment for grandparents, combined with Mark Latham's other announcements, will help ensure that the grandparents and the children they care for will finally get support from the federal government after eight and a half years of absolute Howard government neglect. This recognition of the dedication of grandparents around the country is well overdue and well deserved. I would ask the opposition to get on the phone to Prime Minister Howard. Let us make this a deal for grandparents overall.