



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR INALA

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SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (10.03 pm): Yesterday, we heard about the money that the Beattie government is investing in infrastructure throughout the state. This government is also putting substantial dollars into social infrastructure. The Queensland government has continued its record spending to protect abused and neglected children, delivering a massive \$503 million operating budget to the Department of Child Safety in 2006-07. The provision of support for children, families, seniors, people with disabilities and those who are doing it tough says something about our society and something about this government.

The Beattie government is committed to strengthening local communities and empowering individuals to make ends meet. Only last week I had the opportunity to attend the opening of the prep playground area at Richlands East Primary School and met with the parents who, through Education Queensland, completed a positive parenting program. Through improved reading and literacy skills, these parents will now be able to be more involved in their children's education by reading to them. This is a great initiative to create positive parenting and to put kids on the path to lifelong learning and training.

It is in stark contrast to the heavy-handed approach of the federal government. Last week, the federal minister, Mal Brough, issued a press release titled 'Quarantining of welfare payments in the best interests of children'. One would think that the minister was about to embark on some kind of military campaign. The phrases 'quarantine', 'mandatory', 'silver bullet' and 'another weapon in the armoury' do not evoke any thoughts of compassion. If Mal Brough is serious about child welfare, he should put more money into early intervention programs.

The latest federal proposal was to give Centrelink officers search and seizure powers. That is right: Centrelink officers. Currently, these functions are performed by the Federal Police, but the Howard government apparently decided that it would be good if Centrelink officers could raid homes without police accompaniment. When I first heard about the proposals, I found them hard to believe, but I can assure members that they were there, hidden away in schedule 2 of the Commonwealth's Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Bill 2006.

The type of fraud for which these powers were proposed to investigate included whether cohabiting welfare recipients were, in fact, in a relationship. It is hard to believe that such a ridiculous and offensive policy managed to make it through the Howard cabinet and the Liberal Party room seemingly without the slightest concern. Despite not having numbers in the Senate, the work of federal Labor ensured that these amendments did not go ahead.

I see the Leader of the Opposition in this place. The members opposite could learn from this example of constructive opposition. But the Liberal Party would rather spend its term in opposition fighting the Nationals or fighting the Liberal leader. While the alleged coalition squabbles and fights like two cats in a bag and while the federal government continues to plot its next grab for power, Queenslanders can have confidence that the Beattie government is getting on with the serious job of giving a helping hand to those most in need.