



Speech by

**Hon. Warren Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

Hansard Thursday, 12 October 2006

---

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### *A Current Affair*

**Hon. FW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Disability Services, Seniors and Youth) (10.10 am): I would like to draw to the attention of the House how *A Current Affair* has resorted to a personal vilification and semantics to falsely accuse me of misleading this House. Why is this? It is designed to divert attention from the real issue, that is, that *A Current Affair* has been caught out dealing in dishonesty. It has been caught out fabricating information, suppressing contrary views and distorting the facts. It is no wonder that it is lashing out; its already poor credibility has been challenged and it does not like it.

I seek leave to table and have incorporated into *Hansard* for the information of the House a letter from Dr James Morton of the Autism Early Intervention Outcomes Unit. Dr Morton appeared on *A Current Affair* on Tuesday night. His letter illustrates the deception and dishonesty of *A Current Affair*.

Leave granted.

*Tabled paper:* A letter dated 10 October 2006 from Dr James Morton.  
October 10, 2006

The Honourable Warren Pitt  
Minister for Communities, Disability Services, and Seniors

Dear Minister

I am writing to express my disappointment in the portrayal of your the government's support of children with autism as reported on *A Current Affair* tonight.

Today I was interviewed by Amanda Paterson concerning Early Intervention Services for children with autism and the current funding issues in this very important area. During the interview I focussed on the anomaly associated with the administration of the Inclusion Support Scheme by the Federal Department of Family and Community and Services. I indicated that a mainstream childcare centre enrolling a child with autism is entitled to receive up to \$19000 funding per annum under this scheme to hire an extra child care assistant, yet programs such as AEIOUs, which provide the equivalent of long stay child care, linked to a high quality early intervention program, including full time speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology and early childhood teaching, does not. I expressed the view that the Federal Government must expand access to this funding stream to providers of specialised childcare such as AEIOU.

Whilst I greatly appreciated the opportunity to highlight the importance of early intervention for children with autism, I feel that the editing of this interview linked these comments to a failure of performance by your government in this area, a sentiment that I did not express and a view that I in no way hold. Furthermore, comments which I made in this interview expressing our appreciation for the efforts made by you personally and your government in supporting children with autism were not reported. I have been interviewed "live" on several previous occasions, most recently by Steve Austin, and my recognition of your efforts in this area is not new.

Through your personal background as an educator you have championed the importance of early intervention and coordinated care for our children with ASD and their families and launched new initiatives in this area, with new recurrent funding of \$2M announced over the last 2 years.

Minister, I can only encourage you to continue with your efforts in supporting children with autism, and continuing to build a brighter future for them and their families.

Yours respectfully

Dr James Morton

**Mr PITT:** Dr Morton expressed reservations about the role of the federal government in respect of payments to families for child care. *A Current Affair* turned this around and attributed the blame to the state government. Dr Morton's letter highlights the inappropriate editing by *A Current Affair* to remove any positive reference to the work of the Queensland government. This letter proves that *A Current Affair* has an agenda of its own and is prepared to go to any lengths to achieve it.

Who are the real victims here? Not me as minister, although I have been maligned and misrepresented. Not the department, although it too has been misrepresented when in this matter staff have acted appropriately, ethically and compassionately. The real victims are the individuals and the families who live with the demands and difficulties of extreme autism every day. *A Current Affair* has shamelessly exploited them and set about destroying their confidence in society's capacity to assist them. There is genuine help available from government and also hardworking NGOs for individuals and families concerned, but their situation certainly is not being assisted by *A Current Affair*.

Finally, I urge the member for Currumbin to also take a responsible approach to this very important issue and not to be an agent, knowingly or otherwise, of the dishonest approach of *A Current Affair*. I repeat my offer to the member for Currumbin of a full briefing on this matter. I look forward to her agreement to do this so that she can become properly informed.

On another matter, in my role as disability services minister I advise members that today is World Sight Day and Shades Day here in Queensland. To highlight the important message of protecting our sight from the harm and damage of ultraviolet light, I have distributed a pair of shades to all members.