



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G (REPORT NO. 2)**

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—Lib) (9.29 pm): In the first instance I would like to express my gratitude to the deputy chair, the honourable member for Toowoomba South, to the chair, the honourable member for Waterford, and to other members of Estimates Committee G for granting me leave to attend the disabilities services section of the hearing. I appreciated the opportunity to question the minister.

However, as stated in my estimates B statement of reservation, the process is flawed and does not permit constructive criticism of the performance of the government. It is no wonder that the external public and media perception of estimates committees is that they are a boring series of exercises and essentially non-events, despite the considerable efforts of the opposition to improve transparency, accountability and competency in ministerial responsibilities.

Considering that many of my questions were asked following in-depth discussions with stakeholders, it was very disappointing that the minister treated many of the serious questions I raised in such a matter-of-fact manner. Upon reading the responses to my questions, the majority of stakeholders have expressed their disappointment with the minister's answers. Some of the minister's comments were even viewed as insulting.

This particular government portfolio covers deeply personal issues. Therefore, taking a bureaucratic and administrative approach in dealing with innately vulnerable people does not address specific individual needs. Seeing people with disabilities as individuals who are fiercely protective of their independence is paramount if governments are genuine in their policy to let people have their say. In the bulk of cases, disabilities, especially those that impact severely, have permanent ramifications. Rarely do they get better with age. Rather, the support needs of people with disabilities frequently increase.

Queenslanders with disabilities deserve assurances from the minister that their current funding and services will not be lost and there must be more opportunity for others to seek assistance and not be pushed further down the 'never to be seen' waiting list. What offends many of the people I spoke to with regard to this year's Disability Services budget was the minister's blatant bragging of this being the biggest funding allocation for this sector by a Queensland government. Despite the very good intentions of the minister, money misspent does not meet the enormous unmet needs of this portfolio.

The minister claims much of his vision for this department to move forward is encapsulated in the document *Growing Stronger*, which was born from the answers to the 'Have your say' consultation survey that concluded in May 2005. Importantly, stakeholders are angry that they were not actively engaged in the consultation process, which did not recognise people with disabilities as being valued citizens who belong, participate and contribute as members of local community life.

Large advocacy groups are concerned that by wasting funds in this portfolio people in need will miss out completely on services that could make a huge difference in their lives. *Growing Stronger* has set off

alarm bells in some sectors and has raised a host of concerns amongst disability stakeholders, which the minister avoided addressing.

With reference to the Growing Stronger initiative, the minister has failed to inspire much confidence in a number of advocacy groups that believe smaller personalised services will be lost and the very people the department is supposed to represent will be further removed from the decision-making process.

The initiative is long on promise but short on detail, causing me to ask if any detail has been developed at all. People want to know what opportunity there is for people with a disability to be involved in the process. How will funding become available? How will assessments take place? How easy will it be for people to change to another service if they are not happy? Is there any review or appeal process if people do not agree with an assessment and will the Disability Services Act be amended to extend the appeal? What role is anticipated for those in advocacy and how will people be informed, especially if they are not currently with the DSQ system?

It is interesting to note that the minister is spending \$28 million to put people on priority waiting lists. We all know the debacle of waiting lists under this government. First there was the health crisis that now has the 'never to be seen' waiting lists, which makes people with a disability shudder. I would like to ask the minister when he intends to get proactive about information sessions on Growing Stronger and also on the Carter report.

The minister sidestepped my question as to whether he would disclose figures relating to need. By doing so he confirmed my fears that he does not have an accurate idea of the size of the problem.

Many other questions need to be asked. For example, when will people with disabilities and their families be advised and resourced to independently engage the quality system of Disability Services Queensland? If the system is going to work, it must inform and connect with people and their families. This is leading families to be placed under insurmountable stress. Parents have to give up their jobs to stay at home and care for their post-school young adults for whom work alternatives are not an option. Those very families are being forced to access their superannuation—

Time expired.