



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Tuesday, 31 July 2012

MOTION: NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME



Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.28 pm): I move—

That this House:

- supports the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme;
- acknowledges that the scheme will benefit Queenslanders with a disability as well as their families and carers by providing care and support over their lifetimes; and
- calls on Premier Newman to allocate funding to a trial of the NDIS in the state of Queensland.

At the outset I say that this government's attitude towards this landmark reform—indeed, this Premier's attitude towards the disabilities community in general—has been nothing short of a disgrace. They have intentionally missed the boat on the landmark reform that is the National Disability Insurance Scheme. They have turned their backs and to do that is to shut down a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I join the thousands of Queenslanders living with a disability and the thousands of family members who care for those Queenslanders in their condemnation of the government's callous disregard for their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and husband and wives. The fact that this government and this Premier refuse to make even a token effort toward the establishment of a national disability insurance trial in Queensland is now not a matter of Queensland shame, it is a matter of national shame. While the premiers of South Australia and Tasmania and the Chief Minister of the ACT have been joined by the premiers of New South Wales and Victoria in allocating funding for trials in their states and territory, this Premier's arrogant, head-in-the-sand reaction is a cruel slap in the face for Queenslanders with a disability.

It is a sad and sorry story that I tell now. Last week the Premier went to Canberra. He went there for the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments in the full knowledge that not only was the NDIS on the agenda but that it was to be the major focus of discussion and negotiation. For the Premier, the NDIS may as well have been the elephant in the room because he went to Canberra ill prepared. He went to Canberra with no intention of progressing Queensland's participation in an NDIS trial. In fact, he went there determined to shut it down. For instance, take the insulting, embarrassing, pitiful preparation his government, and particularly his disabilities minister, Ms Davis, put in ahead of the COAG meeting. While Victoria and New South Wales prepared submissions numbering more than 100 pages each, and those submissions acknowledged and addressed the NDIS criteria, the Queensland disabilities minister offered a meagre—a pathetic—one and a half page submission. I repeat that—it was a one and a half page submission. What a complete and utter embarrassment! What an insulting backhander to the thousands of Queenslanders with a disability. What was the other cruel hoax played on this state? It was for the people living in Gympie, because the Premier held up Gympie as the place where there could be a trial for the NDIS in Queensland. What did the people of Gympie get? What did the member for Gympie deliver? Absolutely nothing!

Any member of the community of people with a disability or any of their families or carers could be forgiven for asking a fundamental question: what has this government got against Queenslanders with a disability? It is a pertinent question considering this government's heartless, unfeeling and cruel behaviour

over just the past week. Throughout the past month thousands of Queensland families living with a disability have been treated with scant regard. In fact, they have been treated with little regard at all as this government continues on its ruthless path of cutting, burning and slashing. Queenslanders with a disability have been singled out in the most distressing way. Those families have received correspondence from the department of the disabilities minister informing them that the support they require and deserve and have received under successive Labor governments is about to be axed. Let us look at what that means. It means families have been put on alert that they will lose hundreds of dollars in support each month and that their access to items vital to the wellbeing of their children and critical to their everyday lives will be axed. That will include items such as incontinence aids, child-care subsidies, travel subsidies and medical and pharmaceutical aids. Those items are made available to the families of Queenslanders with a disability under the \$47 million Family Support Program, a program that this government and the minister who is sitting in the House tonight have determined to slash.

On top of that, just days later the government's transport minister announced the end of the taxi disability scheme, an important travel initiative for disabled Queenslanders that will be cut off before it is even started. The former Labor government announced that fully funded \$1.5 million subsidy earlier this year with an implementation date of 1 July. It was to provide a sum—

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Members opposite can mark my words: they will hear about it in their electorate offices. The scheme was to provide a sum of \$6.50 for every trip taken in a cab by a wheelchair-bound passenger. For many Queenslanders with a disability, that is the only safe and viable means of transport. To put it bluntly, to axe that scheme is mean-spirited, it is extreme and it is fundamentally wrong. It is the final blow in a triple whammy against this community.

Just as many in the community of people with a disability will be feeling let down, betrayed, shocked and lost at this government's attitude towards them. Frankly I am also at a loss to understand the motivation behind this uncaring approach to the needs of this vulnerable and often marginal sector of our society. It is critical to remember that people with a disability are not all born that way. In fact, a disability can happen to anyone at any time. Each year there are between 300 and 400 new cases of spinal cord injury. In 2006-07 alone, 142 Australians suffered a spinal cord injury as a result of traffic accidents. A figure of 2.2 per cent of the population, one in every 45 people, have an acquired brain injury. The vast majority of those were suffered also in some form of traffic mishap. Those are the frightening statistics that tell us that life can change in the blink of an eye. Disability can happen to any one of us, altering our lives and the lives of those around us immediately.

As a former disabilities minister, I have first-hand knowledge of the needs of this community, their vulnerabilities, their heartbreak and their day-to-day struggles. For two years as a former disabilities minister, I visited hundreds of people with a disability. I sat down and listened to them talk about their concerns. We continued to increase the budget for the disability sector time and time again. That is what the Labor government delivered. Parents raising children with disabilities, often into adulthood, often do so in the most challenging of circumstances. They require our support. They need a caring hands-on government. They deserve our acknowledgement and they deserve to have the government of the day fight the good fight. In refusing to take seriously the NDIS, this government has failed in that fundamental task.

I have spent time with Bailey who was left a quadriplegic after a horrific car accident that claimed the life of his brother, Jett. I met Ellen, who was struck down with Huntington's disease in her early 30s, thereby demanding her mother's day-to-day attention until her death. Her mother, Colleen, knows the raw pain and heartache of a mother of kids with disabilities losing not one but both of her children to Huntington's disease. Those are the real people who deserve better than to be treated as a political football. They are the real people who deserve better than having their Premier travel to the national capital without any intention—no intention whatsoever—of negotiating on their behalf and without any intention of fighting the good fight.

To play politics with the lives of some of our most vulnerable families who struggle every day in often unthinkable circumstances to care for their infant, their teenage or their adult children with a disability is to look the other way. When you turn your back on an initiative like the NDIS, you turn your back on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for change. You turn your back on hope. You forfeit the chance to be part of a landmark national social reform that everyone must be part of. This government has shut the door. It has closed the door on thousands of Queenslanders with a disability. I commend the motion to the House.