




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 31 July 2012

MOTION: NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.54 pm): I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion. In August 2011, the Australian government released the Productivity Commission's final report on disability care and support. Queensland provided in-principle support for the Productivity Commission's report to establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme. Shortly after, COAG agreed that the need for major reform of disability services in Australia through an NDIS was necessary.

It was the position of the previous Labor government in Queensland that, in line with the Productivity Commission's report, the Australian government had the greater financial capacity to support an NDIS and that it should exercise policy and regulatory responsibility to create a genuinely nationally consistent scheme. However, let us be clear that this position was based on the fact that discussions were still ongoing about an appropriate funding arrangement, which I am sure all would agree is critical to ensuring the long-term viability and success of an NDIS.

Prior to the election, like other jurisdictions, we sought clarity regarding the responsibilities for each level of government and funding arrangements. We saw this as being important before any firm position and any subsequent funding could be committed to by Queensland. At that time—and this is important—no offer had been made by the Australian government for us to consider, but the Prime Minister announced that the start date for trials would be from mid-2013.

In September 2011, as minister for disability services, I launched the Queensland government's 10-year plan for Queenslanders with a disability called Absolutely Everybody. In that plan, Labor had committed Queensland to ongoing reforms, and this plan deliberately included a transition to an NDIS. To support this, we established the \$1.5 million Queensland Readiness for Disability Reform initiative to assist NGOs—as well as people with a disability, their families and their carers—to prepare for ongoing disability reforms.

The fact is, and no doubt Minister Davis will attest to this, that disability reform is ongoing and it could be argued that a national approach is inevitable. And that is why our participation in an NDIS trial is so important. It is important to ensure that the unique needs of people with a disability in regional areas of Queensland are factored into how a national scheme would operate, including remote Indigenous communities. I constantly highlighted at the meetings of states and territories that Queensland is the only truly decentralised state. Western Australia try to lay claim to that tag too, but in reality they have more of a hub and spoke model. The definition of regional is different from state to state. Regional Victoria is very different to regional Queensland in terms of scale and distance.

Last year I represented Queensland on the COAG Select Council on Disability Reform to work on foundation reforms. The work of the council was guided by a set of principles endorsed by COAG in late 2011 and included the following statement—

All governments recognise that addressing the challenges in disability services will require shared or coordinated effort.

It is that shared and coordinated effort that was the hallmark of the select council. Disability ministers from the conservative states of New South Wales and Victoria—Andrew Constance and Mary Wooldridge—were both strong contributors to this process, at least during the time I was the minister in Queensland, and appeared to be leaving politics out of it.

But then there is the Premier. While the Treasurer was telling the truth to overseas investors, the Premier was here at home playing politics. His reckless statements regarding Spain were made as an excuse to avoid putting \$26 million over three years on the table to deliver an NDIS trial site in Queensland. This level of funding represents just 0.06 per cent of the state budget. It contrasts with the Premier's commitment for a \$65 million council road upgrade in his own electorate that he says the state can afford.

Labor recognised with Absolutely Everybody and the Growing Stronger intake and assessment process that there was a need to transition to individual funding for greater choice and control—including portability between service providers, improved access to aids and equipment, and innovation for new technologies. It was recognised that we needed to work towards building the capacity of disability service providers and the disability workforce to provide greater choice and control and contemporary service models. It was recognised that under Labor in Queensland the budget for Disability Services increased by a massive 495 per cent, but it still was not enough. There would continue to be unmet need.

There is no doubt that the implementation of an NDIS would mean a fundamental change to the way in which people access disability support to help them live their lives. It is about moving from a welfare approach to an insurance approach and giving people choice in how they access support. It is about enabling people to move between states and manage their support package. It is about supporting people with disabilities and their families and carers to plan for the future. It is about providing a greater level of certainty in the long term—particularly for ageing parent carers who want to know what will happen to their son or daughter when they are no longer able to care for them.

There is a reason why other jurisdictions are getting on board with the Australian government's national disability reforms. With an offer from the federal government to commence the trials, they see that we have an historic opportunity—a once in a generation opportunity—to make significant and lasting change to empower people with a disability in this country. They are getting on board because they are viewing this for the long term and not taking a short-term approach. I urge the Premier to reconsider his position and see Queensland's participation in a trial site as an investment in the future and not to take a 'wait and see' approach.