




Speech by

Desley Scott

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES, CHILD SAFETY AND DISABILITY SERVICES, JOBS

 **Mrs SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (11.27 am): 'No gift bestowed upon us is so precious as children. They are the hope of the future.' This quote from former US politician James E Faust manages to convey in a few words why protection of children should be one of the most important considerations of government. That is why I was so disappointed to read the *Brisbane Times* article this morning which tells of jobs being cut in child safety. Child safety workers in Emerald have had a worrying time wondering about the fate of their jobs. After years of working with the child safety workers in my area of Woodridge and getting to know the people who do these jobs I am sure their greatest concern is not for themselves, but for the vulnerable children they work so hard to protect.

According to the *Brisbane Times* article, an Excel document prepared by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services outlines 229 positions on a list of temporary engagements where current arrangements are not being renewed. So right across the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, the department that is supposed to care for some of the most vulnerable people in Queensland, 229 jobs are being cut. According to the interim report of the Commission of Audit at page 7, much of the previous Labor government's increased expenditure was directed at policy objectives including Child Safety Services.

Further on in the report, at page 107, it was acknowledged that the substantial increase in per capita spending by the previous government reflected a number of policy objectives by government to expand levels of service delivery. Those include introducing a prep year into schooling; significantly increasing child safety services; increasing hospital bed numbers; substantially increasing wages and conditions for doctors, nurses and clinical staff; increasing public transport infrastructure and services; and increasing effort in disability services. I would love to know which of those services the LNP would not have provided had it been in government.

At page 137 of the interim report it was acknowledged that in January 2004 the Crime and Misconduct Commission released its final report on abuse in foster care, *Protecting children: an inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*, and the government implementation of that report fundamentally changed the child protection system in Queensland. There was a significant investment in new structures for child safety, including the appointment of additional child safety officers. Those child safety officers need to know that they will be able to continue to provide those services to the vulnerable children who rely on them for their safety and care.

I refer to the answer to a question without notice from the Leader of the Opposition, given this morning by the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, in reference to people in her department on temporary contracts. Her response seemed to indicate that the way of dealing with the uncertainty of whether temporary contracts will be renewed is to end this uncertainty by decisively ending the contracts. I think a better way to end the uncertainty would be to guarantee jobs for front-line officers. However, I would also urge consideration being given to guaranteeing the jobs of support staff who back

up the front-line officers. If the front-line officers are being taken offline to carry out the administrative tasks previously undertaken by support staff, they are not looking after our children.

The government has been less than honest about the public sector job situation in Queensland. As the audit report itself states at page 104—

As a proportion of the population, the Queensland public sector (4.5%) is similar to Western Australia (4.5%) ...

It also notes that, except for Health, the increases in all other functions relative to the year 2000 are broadly in line with population growth. I urge the minister to stop playing political football with Queensland's most vulnerable people.