

DISABILITY SERVICES

Urgency Motion

THE PRESIDENT (Hon J.A. Cowdell): I received the following letter this morning -

Dear Mr President

At today's sitting it is my intention to move under Standing Order 72 that:

The House at it's rising adjourn until 9.00pm on Friday 1st March 2002 to consider matters of urgency in the Disability Services portfolio.

Yours sincerely

Simon O'Brien

Member for South Metropolitan Region

Opposition Spokesperson for Disability Services; Drug Strategy.

The member will require the support of four members in order to move the motion.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [3.43 pm]: I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 pm on 1 March.

I have selected that date for a very good reason. It is the nominal date to occur in a notice of motion given under Standing Order No 72, to which I will refer in due course. I thank the House for the opportunity to address a number of issues in the public domain at this time that are of great interest to many people who are concerned about the future viability of the disability sector, particularly those with close personal relationships as carers of people with multiple disabilities.

This is also an opportunity for the Opposition to state its views on a number of matters. Given that it is our intention to work constructively at all times with the Government in the field of disability services, it may be of assistance to the community generally to know where we stand and the parameters within which we view the world. What do we stand for? The Opposition continues to identify strongly with the vision statement of the Disability Services Commission created under statute in 1993 by the then Minister for Disability Services, Kevin Minson. That vision statement reads -

All people live in welcoming communities that provide friendship, mutual support and a 'fair go' for everyone including people with disabilities, their families and carers.

The Opposition also takes this opportunity to restate its commitment to the core values set out in the mission statement. I refer to three values in particular -

- Services provided by government and funded agencies complement and support the role of families, carers and communities.
- Partnerships between individuals, families and carers, communities, governments, service providers and the business sector are vital in meeting the needs of people with disabilities.
- People who work with people with disabilities are valued and supported.

Together with the other values indicated in the mission statement of the Disability Services Commission, I reiterate the Liberal Opposition's commitment to those values.

A couple of reviews are occurring in the field of disability services. One of those is a review of the Disability Services Act 1993, required under that Act at regular intervals. The present review is under the chairmanship of Hon Sue Ellery. I acknowledge the heavy workload she and her colleagues have taken on in travelling around and consulting with stakeholders in all corners of the State. It is a big job. I have participated in a few of those consultation forums.

The trigger for the review is partly the change of government and the Gallop Government's machinery of government machinations. The Government is killing two birds with one stone and has taken the opportunity to bring forward by 12 or 18 months the regular review of the Act that would be required under section 57. Members should have no doubt that this review is prompted by machinery of government considerations.

I refer the House to a statement released by Labor prior to the election which reads -

The Labor Policy 'Delivering a better Government' stated "**we are committed to maintaining the Disability Services Commission in its current form.**"

Other documents also state similar sentiments. I believe in response to a series of questions asked by people with disabilities in February 2001 on the eve of the state election, the then Labor Opposition said that Labor's policy announcement to reform the public sector clearly indicated, among other things, that it would not affect the Disability Services Commission, but that it would bring reforms to other agencies that would enable them to work with the DSC to achieve better outcomes where cross-agency cooperation is required. The response also acknowledged that -

The current structure of the DSC has enabled the co-ordinated delivery of services to people with a disability.

That seems pretty clear.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Can I just ask -

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I have only limited time, so perhaps I will respond once Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has had her say. I need to canvass a number of matters. There is some concern that one of the main purposes of the review of the Act at this time is to actively consider the future of the board of the Disability Services Commission and whether a board should exist as the governing body of the commission or be done away with. For the purpose of the debate today I point out to the House that in all the liaison I have had with the sector, I have not come across any attitude that expresses itself as a desire to do away with the board or its functions or that a change of that sort, perhaps accompanied by a change of name and so on to show that things are moving, would necessarily be a constructive move. Many of the stakeholders, particularly in non-government organisations, are concerned by that prospect. The Opposition awaits the final report of the review team with interest. Our view is that in the absence of new and remarkable arguments to the contrary, the role of the board as a governing body is a key part in the success of disability services in Western Australia. The Opposition supports its retention.

I move on to other high profile matters of public importance. Members will have received a communication by e-mail from Sue Harris on behalf of the Disability Coalition of Western Australia, which draws the attention of members to the coalition's campaign to resolve the crisis in accommodation support funding. That is the term used in the communication. I know Sue well, as I am sure do other members. On behalf of the Disability Coalition, she has asked for a commitment from the Commonwealth and State Governments, and from all political parties, to address and resolve this crisis. On behalf of the Opposition I am pleased to offer the following comments in response to the issues raised in the public domain. In its Time to Care Campaign, the Disability Coalition raised issues for consideration by all members. A flier dated January 2002 and called "Time to Care Campaign. Newsflash Number 2." states in part -

We call on the Government of Western Australia . . .

TO PROVIDE . . . emergency funding for accommodation support for Western Australians with disabilities and their families currently in critical need.

TO RESOLVE . . . the crisis in unmet need. To develop a strategy to resolve the backlog of unmet need for accommodation support over a period of the next 3 to 5 years.

TO PLAN . . . to meet future need. By December 2002, to have developed a plan to address the ongoing and long term accommodation support needs of Western Australians with disabilities.

TO PROMOTE . . . a national approach to resolving the accommodation crisis.

The document concludes by pointing out that -

The Commonwealth Government has a responsibility to contribute to the resolution of this crisis.

On that last point, disability services are primarily a state government responsibility. The Commonwealth has some clearly defined responsibilities in related areas, including disability pensions and certain employment services. It has some responsibilities also through the commonwealth-state disability agreements, the second and most recent of which expires at the end of June. That again is a matter of great concern to all involved in the sector. Considerable disquiet will be expressed until the new commonwealth-state disability agreement is signed. There is a concern that the Commonwealth Government will not join in as full a partnership with the States as it has in the past in providing additional recurrent expenditure to meet immediate and critical needs. That disquiet will remain until the matter is resolved and the ink is dry on the agreement. It will include uncertainty about whether funds that were provided in the past to assist will be of a recurrent or one-off nature.

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When accommodation support funding is made available, it must be made available in the long term. One-offs are not good enough.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: The Commonwealth has the goods and services tax, so it should be doing better than providing 16 per cent -

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The undertaking -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I call Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich to order.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I look forward with great interest to the comments of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich in just a few minutes, just as I relish my right of reply.

For some months there has been a standing offer by the Liberal Opposition to do all it can to assist the State Government and in particular the Minister for Disability Services in securing the best possible deal for Western Australia in the commonwealth-state disability agreement. The Opposition is prepared to assist in any way it can to achieve that, because this is the sort of matter which requires politics to be put firmly to one side. The Opposition is interested in securing better resources for the people of Western Australia. It has already made some contacts -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You're trying to excuse your commonwealth colleagues.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I can play that game too, if the member wishes.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: If the State Government wishes, the Opposition will work with it to achieve that. Discussions are already going on with our federal colleagues. I publicly commit to supporting the process which seeks to get the best return for Western Australia.

In relation to other matters concerning emergency funding and the so-called crisis in unmet need, I am aware that state cabinet ministers get together this Friday to make their budget bids. I wish the Minister for Disability Services every consideration by her colleagues and that they recognise that the ongoing maintenance of funding in Western Australian disability services is absolutely essential to ensure that the level of unmet need does not blow out to greater proportions. The Opposition looks forward to a good result from the Government in that respect. Similarly, we wish the minister success in the commencement of negotiations for the commonwealth-state disability agreement on 1 March.

HON BARBARA SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [3.58 pm]: I support this motion. It is a matter of utmost urgency. In the light of the comments of Hon Simon O'Brien, it was wise that the wording of the adjournment was changed to provide that the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 pm on Friday, 1 March. This Government came into office offering to be sympathetic to the area of disability services. I can see no change in direction to provide any increase in the funding to this area. I am pleased that Hon Sue Ellery is chairing a review of the Act, but I hope that this Government does not spend all its time reviewing an Act when the figures are on the table. We know what the shortfall is, especially the shortfall in the funding for accommodation in this area. I hope this does not mean a review which concentrates just on the changes in the machinery of government and which makes some suggestions that do not actually help the disabled people in this State. It is not for me to cite the high numbers of disabled or the reasons for an increase in this area in the State, but it is of major concern to this Parliament. Both sides of Parliament need to be very aware that because of road trauma and our efficient methods of maintaining low birth weight babies, a higher number of people with brain damage are falling into the disability category. It is a real need in the community.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: If it is such a need, why was your previous Government not in a position to negotiate more than a 16 per cent contribution from your colleagues?

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Our previous minister, Hon Paul Omodei, probably has the best record of any state minister in negotiating in the area of disability with not only the federal Parliament but also his cabinet colleagues. The increase in money is on the record. The fact is that the shortfall is huge. It will take a Government with real commitment to the disabled in the community to make up that shortfall. There is a federal responsibility, but it is minor; the State Government has the major responsibility. I hope that the review being conducted by Hon Sue Ellery addresses the urgency of the need in this area. I ask that the current Government, while reviewing the Act and the services, alters its mindset a bit and looks at funding for the aged in our community. No person in this community is left with a highly dependent aged person any longer because of the

move towards housing them in accommodation that is appropriate for them; yet, there are cases and cases in the community in which elderly parents must look after grossly disabled children, while their whole lives are altered and put on hold. I am pleading with the Government, which came in on a vote of confidence that it would be compassionate in these areas, to look seriously at increasing funding for this sector.

I am very privileged to have been adopted by a disabled person some three or four years ago. It was not my first experience with disabled people, because I have friends with disabled children. The person who adopted me is Monica McGhie, who was born with no arms or legs. She has had to fight for everything she has. She has supported accommodation with carers; more than perhaps some other people. Monica has had to work very hard with my assistance to get a proper chair. She is an artist and maintains a gallery in Fremantle. However, at this stage she cannot have a carer for the times she is at the gallery. She must plan not to have to use the toilet if she is at the gallery for five hours. Her whole life must be structured. If she wants to go to the gallery for five hours of painting, she must plan what she eats and drinks in the previous 24 hours.

The current structure of the Disability Services Commission seems to have worked very well with the board, so I hope there is no suggestion that that will disappear. It is very aware of the shortfall of funding that is needed to meet the crisis. A constituent of mine in East Fremantle lost her husband two years ago, and together they shared the responsibility of caring for their fifth child, a son. He is now 19 years of age. This year he is not at school. She is 62 years old and has the lone responsibility for this young man. He has no speech; he is like a two-year-old. He was about fifteenth on the list for supported accommodation 18 months ago. He has now been moved to ninetieth. It is a pretty despairing story for those aged parents out there who have children, often adult children, to care for. I plead with Hon Sue Ellery - I know she has a union background - to look at the pay rates and scales for parents who get an allocation each year. In this case, I cite my constituent who can access between \$25 000 and \$30 000 a year for respite and care. Now that her son is not at school, he is at home four days a week. She can afford to have only three days of care. There is a top limit of \$12 an hour to pay for people who care for the disabled. I ask the member who is a unionist, is that a fair rate?

Hon Sue Ellery: No, it is not. The previous Government pushed down those rates even further by introducing workplace agreements.

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: How can the member expect anybody to take on the care and control of a 19-year-old who acts like a two-year-old for that low salary?

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: How hypocritical of you!

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: That is not fair.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: You had eight years in government and sat on your hands. It is disgraceful that you should come into this place and carry on as though you had no responsibility.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon BARBARA SCOTT: Has the member looked at the number of adjournment debates during which I addressed the disability area while we were in government? I ask Hon Sue Ellery, as the chairman of this review and with her union background, to look at what her Government is doing to parents by allowing them a ceiling of \$12 an hour for a salary. Who in their right mind would take on that sort of responsibility for \$12 an hour?

The people involved with the Time to Care Campaign approached me to support them in urging the federal and State Governments - there is a responsibility for both - to increase the funding for emergency accommodation. I wrote to every Liberal Party member of the federal Parliament, and I hope they will take that to their minister. It needs an effort of the whole Parliament to address this issue. I put it at the feet of the Labor Government: this must be right in its caring, sharing policy. I hope it will be addressed and that the shortfall will be found when the ministers meet and put in their bids, along with their other cabinet colleagues.

HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan) [4.07 pm]: On behalf of the Greens (WA) I support this motion. It has been said that this is an issue which all parties have a common concern about and interest in. It is a very clear indication of how deep the crisis is in support services, particularly crisis accommodation. A number of people with disabilities, their carers, friends and supporters took it upon themselves to have a sit-in at the office of the Disability Services Commission to support the Time to Care Campaign and to make their point that they had reached a crisis. They had not been listened to by successive federal or State Governments when they were told about the severe circumstances in which those people find themselves. Along with other members here, I met with some of the people who were at the commission a couple of Fridays ago and spent some time discussing with them their personal stories. The commitment that the carers and family of those people with disabilities are living with while they await the necessary accommodation for those people is extraordinary.

The coalition of organisations that is pushing for an immediate response to the crisis in accommodation distributed a letter which stated that over the past year 476 people with disabilities have applied unsuccessfully for accommodation support funding with more than half of these people considered to be priority one or in the most critical need category for funding. Many of these people are at a crisis point and have no choice but to struggle on often in circumstances of unbelievable difficulty. At least a further 100 people in this position are expected to apply for funding over the next year. At this stage it is expected that funding for 45 additional people will be available in 2000-03.

Many people are living on the brink because of their physical inability to continue caring for people with disabilities. Certainly, few of us can fully understand the emotional and psychological demands that are placed on those who must provide 24 hour a day support to people with disabilities in every facet of their lives. The point has already been made that many of these carers are getting older. When the people who have put in such an extraordinary commitment to look after people with disabilities cry out for help, they really need it. There is absolutely no question that they have given everything they can. One has to remember the emotions and the feelings of guilt that these carers go through when they finally put up their hand and admit that they have to put their child into accommodation - at this point they are facing dire circumstances. One also has to remember the effort that it has taken for the carers to get out of their homes to attend a demonstration; that in itself is extraordinary.

It is vital that we try to work on this issue in a combined way so that it does not become a party-political football. It is important that this issue does not become a political football between the State and Commonwealth; however, obviously it already is. This problem has not just arisen in the term of the present Government; it was a problem faced by the previous Government, the one before that, and the one before that. Therefore, there has been a cumulative effect. Some of the things that happened under the previous Government have not helped the situation, and I have no doubt that in issues across the board we have the most uncaring federal Government that has ever been in office. It does not matter whether we are talking about the treatment of refugees, or whether we are talking about the treatment of any issue requiring compassion, attention and funding. I do not hold much hope for the federal Government having much interest in this issue at all. It is up to Western Australian members of Parliament to work together to come up with a solution. I implore this Parliament to devise a plan to fix what is an emergency in the lives of these people.

It was pointed out recently in both the Press and in conversation with some of these carers that a tragedy will occur because some people will not be able to continue to care for people with disabilities. Of course, at the moment they have to keep going because there is no other choice. In some respects that is why they can be ignored as a lobby group; they are so busy doing the work that is required of them to care for those with disabilities that it is difficult for them to get out and be heard. That is why the community and members of Parliament should be doing everything they can to look after these carers. They have given enormously of themselves, and they are not being recompensed adequately for the contribution they make. The very least that we can do is to put the issue of where money should be spent to all parties. We seem to be able to find money for roads, for subsidising industry, and to send troops to Afghanistan. However, we cannot find the money required to look after the people in our own community who are crying out in desperation. The Greens (WA) will be working in every way possible to find a solution to this problem before it becomes a major political football because if that happened there would be an unfortunate outcome.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [4.15 pm] I am never surprised by the comments members of the Opposition make about responsibility. When I look across the Chamber I see a teflon team - nothing sticks to them, and problems are always the fault of somebody else, and somebody else must find the solutions. It beggars belief that members opposite claim that 16 per cent -

Hon Simon O'Brien: The whole substance of my address was to offer assistance in a bipartisan fashion.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is fine. However, I will tell it like it really is. Hon Simon O'Brien has told me that a 16 per cent contribution by the federal Government is adequate and that he has accepted it as being so for the past eight years! Therefore, the fact that he is now saying that there is insufficient money in the disabilities services area beggars belief - it is the cheek of all cheeks.

Mr President, 84 per cent of the funding in this area is contributed by the State. The party on the other side of the Chamber signed away our taxation powers so that we would be adequately compensated - supposedly - by the federal Government with the goods and services tax -

Hon Simon O'Brien: What are you talking about?

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Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am talking about the fact that we do not have the capacity to generate income from a number of revenue sources. We are increasingly reliant on the GST and we are still stuck with a paltry 16 per cent contribution from the Commonwealth Government. Yet, Hon Simon O'Brien is telling me that is okay. What an absolute disgrace!

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I will address some of Hon Simon O'Brien's concerns. There was a \$15.7 million increase for recurrent expenditure in the budget for 2001-02 compared with the previous year. There was a \$16.8 million increase on the previous year's out turn, adjusted for comparative purposes, which includes capital and recurrent. That represented \$8.5 million in real growth. That in turn represents an 11 per cent increase. In case members opposite have not noticed, amazing pressures have been placed on the disability services area. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to go into them now because I have only seven minutes and 27 seconds left in which to speak. However, we have a problem with aging carers who can no longer care for their sons and daughters and so we must find appropriate accommodation for them. Also, there are community expectations. These days we do not hide people with disabilities. The community expects such people to participate in a full and active life. Hon Barbara Scott mentioned Monica McGhie whom I have met briefly. She is an excellent example of a person with a disability who is participating in a pretty full life. She has a right to expect as does the community that we look after her and those who have a disability in a dignified way.

I turn now to some of the comments made by Hon Simon O'Brien. He suggested that the review of the Disability Services Act 1993 was carried out for purely political purposes.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: That is a requirement of the Act.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It is a requirement of the Act but we brought it forward to coincide with the -

Hon Sue Ellery: The major emphasis was the machinery of government.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is right.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It was due for review in 2002 and it was brought forward by six months. Hon Simon O'Brien should do a bit of homework. The machinery of government review was a major reason. It was not the major reason. The primary reason was the requirement to meet the five-year review period, and the machinery of government review was a consideration.

The Disability Coalition was referred to by Hon Simon O'Brien. That organisation has a different view on commonwealth-state responsibility. It holds the view that the Commonwealth does have some responsibility in this area. It appears that everyone, apart from our opposition colleagues, holds the view that the Commonwealth is responsible in this area.

A sit-in was held on 8 February, organised by the Disability Coalition; it consisted of over 200 people with disabilities, their family and friends.

Hon Simon O'Brien: I was there to listen. The parliamentary secretary was not there.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I cannot even remember getting an invitation. I was not there. A number of demands were raised. The first demand was to promote a national approach for resolving the accommodation crisis. The Commonwealth Government has a responsibility to contribute to the resolution of that crisis. In response, the minister will meet with her federal counterpart, Amanda Vanstone, next week in Melbourne when she will be trying to get a better deal for Western Australians with disabilities. We do not accept that 16 per cent is sufficient, particularly in the light of my earlier comment that we have given away so many taxing powers and we were promised that we would be better looked after through the amount of money the State would receive. We have not seen that to date.

The second matter that the Disability Coalition demanded was a plan to meet future need. By December 2002 is wants a plan developed to address the ongoing and long-term accommodation support needs of Western Australians with disabilities. An interim review of the accommodation support funding process report is available to interested members on one of the Disability Services Commission web sites.

The third demand by the Disability Coalition was a resolution of the crisis in unmet need and the development of a strategy to resolve the backlog of unmet need for accommodation support over the next three to five years. The minister, during her meetings with the federal Government, will be urging equalisation of effort from the Commonwealth Government; she will be calling on it to offer equal effort - not an 84 per cent-16 per cent split; it has to be better than that. This would mean an additional 45 full-time accommodation places a year, along

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with support for an additional 221 people at home, which would make significant inroads into demand in this area. My understanding is that if the federal Government contributed funding for an additional 45 full-time accommodation places and maintained that effort, the crisis in accommodation would not exist.

Mr President, I think you would have to agree that the contribution by the federal Government has been pretty poor, and that members opposite have done nothing in the past eight years. They have sat on their hands.

Hon Simon O'Brien: That is an outrageous remark.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am telling the member that 16 per cent -

Several members interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: They are not pathetic. The bottom line is -

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am sure Hansard is having some difficulty recording three or four comments at the one time.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The point I make is that we are aiming for commonwealth-state equalisation of funding - 16 per cent versus 84 per cent is nowhere near equalisation. That 16 per cent must have been around during the past eight years and we are still left to negotiate on that figure with the Commonwealth Government. My understanding is that if the Commonwealth Government promised the same support that has been promised by the State Government for next financial year in the forward estimates, Western Australia would be able to offer jointly at least an additional 90 people with disabilities full-time accommodation and a further 442 people support in their own homes. The bottom line is that this would eliminate the State's problem.

HON DERRICK TOMLINSON (East Metropolitan) [4.26 pm]: I have a vivid recollection of attending a lecture in what was then Psychology 100 as a first year undergraduate student in 1959, in which Professor Walker -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I wasn't even born then.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Then the member should listen, because she will learn something very important. I remember Professor Walker in his lecture talking about distribution of intelligence, and IQ was the flavour of the month at that time. He talked about normal IQ being in the range of 90 to 110; he then went on to categories that he described as retarded, imbeciles and cretins. What stuck in my mind was Professor Walker saying that that group categorised as cretins have a life expectancy of five to 10 years and those categorised as imbeciles had a life expectancy of about 15 years. That was in 1959. In the year 2002 their life expectancy is in the order of 55 to 65 years; in other words, they are living longer. It is not simply a question of the ageing parent; it is the ageing group of disabled. At any one time three per cent of the population will be born with a disability. There is a constant increase simply because we have maintained life where life was once short. As a result of three per cent of the population being born with a disability we will have an exponential increase in demand for support services. Add to that the fact that an increasing number of people become disabled as a result of trauma - for example, motor vehicle trauma - and are kept alive as disabled people. Not only have we in the past 40 years had exponential growth in the number of older disabled people, we have also had an incremental growth in the number of people who become disabled as a result of trauma.

This is the crisis we have not kept up with. We have had changes in policy. Up until 1973 the State had no responsibility for disabled people; it was the responsibility of the parents or philanthropic organisations, such as the Spastic Welfare Association of WA and so on. Until 1973 there was no education for disabled children, and one of the great achievements of the Whitlam Government was the introduction of financial support for disabled education. In the 1980s we went one step further in the treatment of disabled persons with the introduction of the process of normalisation - taking them out of institutions and putting them into the community where they could be given the opportunity to be recognised as human beings.

It is a pity that in this debate today we have politicised caring for people who, by virtue of being disabled, need care that none of us needs. If any message is to be taken from this debate it is that - I will use Gough Whitlam's phrase - it is time. It is time that we depoliticise this issue and do what Hon Simon O'Brien suggested and take a bipartisan approach to this issue. We should stop blaming the past, because in the past each of us was guilty of sins of omission. We should look forward to the development of policies in a bipartisan way so that the needs of the growing population of disabled people are met.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [4.30 pm]: I thank all honourable members for their contributions. In particular, I thank Hon Barbara Scott and Hon Giz Watson for their contributions; I share many of Hon Giz Watson's sentiments. When she was talking about an uncaring federal Government she probably

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meant the most unfair, uncaring federal Government since the Keating Government, but that is a story for another day.

In fairness, it is a bit harsh to say that successive Governments have not listened to the disability sector. People do care and successive Governments have grappled very hard with the issue, although whether they have been successful in meeting people's needs could be debated. I certainly hope that the limited success of previous Governments is not due to a lack of good intentions.

Hon Giz Watson: It is due to a lack of money.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: A lot of the time it is because of a lack of money. I thank also Hon Derrick Tomlinson for his supportive contribution.

I will address a few remarks to the parliamentary secretary, who misjudges the purpose of this motion. Its purpose is to offer a vehicle for comment to concerned members of the disabilities community who are seeking from various parties represented in this Parliament some statements of intent about where they stand on certain issues. I will resist the temptation to enter into a hammer and tongs shouting match with Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich because there is more at stake than that. However, I direct her to page 1534 of the 1997 *Hansard*, when the fairly new Minister for Disability Services, Mr Omodei, reported on the commonwealth-state disability agreement. He was able to announce that the negotiations for the second commonwealth-state disability agreement had been successfully completed. He pointed out that there had been uncertainty because the old agreement, which had expired in June 1997, had been continued only on a monthly basis. Disabled people and their carers had therefore felt a sense of disquiet. However, the then minister was able to report that over the next four years Western Australia was to receive an additional \$10.2 million from the Commonwealth over and above the funding to Western Australia under the commonwealth-state disability agreement of \$22 million per annum. That represented 14.6 per cent of Western Australia's total disability budget at that time. That is the type of outcome I want to see from the third commonwealth-state disability agreement. If the Government does not want our active cooperation in trying to achieve that outcome, that is fine. However, the community will not appreciate that line when we tell them that we have been prepared to cast off all the rancour to get on with it.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I have already said that I have commenced that progress already, including at least one formal meeting. I suggest that the parliamentary secretary for disability services should ask people from the disability sector about her comment that the coalition sat on its hands for eight years. She will find that that is not the case.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: I am saying that 16 per cent is too low.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: On what basis does the member say that? In 1997, it was 14.6 per cent of the total disability budget. During that time, the whole budget had been recently inflated by the then Government to the tune of \$40.4 million growth funding, accounted for in its five-year business plan, and it had been significantly increased in other ways. We had secured from the Commonwealth above-the-agreement funds of \$10 million. To say that the former Government did not care or did not achieve anything in the disabilities sector is a cheap shot not borne out by the facts. The causes of the accommodation crisis are not a lack of care by the previous Government; they are other factors to which Hon Derrick Tomlinson referred. I thank members for their generally positive contribution to this debate.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.