

COMMONWEALTH-STATE-TERRITORY DISABILITY AGREEMENT

26. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Disability Services:

Is the minister aware that a motion to hold an inquiry into the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement was considered in the Senate on Thursday, 2 March, but was not supported by Liberal and National Party senators? Can the minister advise of the implications for people with disabilities in Western Australia as a result of this inaction?

Ms M.M. QUIRK replied:

I thank the member for Joondalup for the question, and for his strong interest in people with disabilities in Western Australia. As the member rightly points out, the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement, or the CSTDA, is up for renegotiation next year. This is a critical document dealing with the allocation of resources between state and territory governments to assist people with disabilities. People with disabilities comprise 20 per cent of the population in Australia but, last Thursday, 34 Liberal and National Party senators declared that the federal Parliament has absolutely no interest in disability issues. Four Liberal senators from Western Australia sold out an estimated 405 000 Western Australians with disabilities by voting against this inquiry. There is only one reason I can infer as to why Mr Howard did not want the Senate inquiry into the CSTDA; that is, it is not working. The inquiry was stymied because it would have exposed the shocking level of unmet need that Mr Howard has allowed to fester in his 10 years of stewardship. It is estimated that this unmet need is close to \$1 billion. Mr Howard does not care whether the funding provided by the commonwealth is actually reaching the people it is intended to support. Frankly, people with disabilities are sick and tired of buck-passing between state and federal governments. They simply want someone to take responsibility and to act responsibly. This inquiry would have starkly pinpointed the governments' respective duties and ensured that the agreement's objectives were properly met. People with disabilities are very disappointed with Mr Howard's failure to acknowledge their concerns. Equally, the state opposition has demoted its shadow minister for this area to a spokesperson on disability services. Not only is the opposition not telling its federal colleagues to lift their game, but also it is demoting its spokesperson.