

“WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES”, MANDURAH

Grievance

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [9.57 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Disability Services; Sport and Recreation; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests; Seniors and Volunteers. I thank the minister for his acceptance of the grievance, which acknowledges the work of a magnificent group of people in our community; namely, our community’s carers who care for their loved ones.

On Tuesday morning in my electorate of Mandurah I attended and assisted with the organisation of an event called “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” to celebrate carers. It was an inaugural event in Mandurah and coincided with a national event involving carers, carer organisations and supporters who gathered in Canberra to highlight to the federal government the issues facing carers in our community. The Mandurah event attracted dozens of people and was organised primarily by local carers. Kaye De Brett and John Nicholson were the organisers, supported strongly by our local carers’ support group. Councillor Hilda White, a wonderfully compassionate city councillor, represented the City of Mandurah. A number of service provider representatives also attended. I congratulate Kay, John and the volunteers who worked hard to get that inaugural event off the ground.

The key aims of the “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” event were to highlight the need for governments of all levels to acknowledge the hidden army of carers and to express to the wider community that everyone faces the prospect of caring for a loved one at some time in their lives and that the community must be better educated on the impact that caring can have on individuals and their families. The “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” event encourages carers and loved ones to bring along a pair of old shoes to symbolise to decision-makers the need to understand the challenges that confront carers every day and to invite decision-makers like us in this place to walk a mile in their shoes.

Earlier this year, the ABC *Four Corners* program titled “The Hidden Army”, highlighted a group of carers and the plight many of them face every day and every week, often for many years, as they care for a loved partner, child, grandchild, parent, friend or other family member. It is important to acknowledge the prediction that one in two of us will be faced with becoming a carer in our lifetime, yet being a carer for many people can be a lonely, isolated existence. A number of issues impact on carers and those they care for every day. Governments of all levels need to respond to the needs of carers. All carers and their loved ones have different needs; they are individuals and their needs change as they age. To use the “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” analogy, it is important to understand that one size does not fit all.

Carers have raised a number of issues that need to be addressed. The federal government is responsible for the payment of the carers allowance and, through Centrelink, can influence the way carers are dealt with. They receive a pittance relative to the amount and type of work they do and the daily pressures and challenges they face. The federal government and all sides of politics must provide more support to carers and their families in policy decision making.

I have heard of the scenario in which a person whose partner has passed away after caring for him or her for many years suddenly receives a notice from Centrelink telling the carer to apply for Job Search. Many of those people have been disconnected from their community because of the role they have played as carers. A more compassionate approach needs to be taken to those people who are in circumstances where they have been caring for a long time and have found themselves without a partner or the loved one they have been caring for. Some compassion is really necessary in those circumstances.

Respite also continues to be a critical issue for carers. Too many in our community still do not have access to respite when they need it - and that is the key issue. Respite is often there but it is not necessarily available at the time it is needed. If a carer’s loved one has an ongoing medical or mental health need and these resources are unavailable or limited, it adds pressure on the carers and what they are trying to do every day. It is important that the federal government, through its agencies that provide respite, recognise that the needs for carers are not all the same and that appropriate funding is required. Once again, one size does not fit all. Respite provisions need to be more flexible and responsive. I know that is true for many people in my electorate.

I acknowledge that the Gallop government has already recognised the important role carers continue to play in our community. I congratulate the minister on the initiatives the government has taken and I am sure that in his response he will outline some of them. The essential focus of my grievance is that governments at all levels cannot ignore this hidden army of carers. They are all individuals. They have hopes and aspirations like everybody else and they have a right to be heard. Many have given one of the greatest sacrifices a person can give, and that is to commit every hour of every day of every week and, for many, years or even decades to a loved one who needs ongoing care. Carers have told me of the tremendous joy and the sense of fulfilment that they receive from being a carer. However, members need to understand that we must care for the carer, that the government must do whatever it can and that the community must continue to support these tremendous people

and assist and acknowledge them in the roles they play. The minister holds a number of portfolios that are involved with carers and their families and he will continue to advocate for a better deal from the federal government and from within this government for carers and their families in our community. This is something that potentially faces all of us in future years and we therefore need to make sure that we respond to the needs of this important group of people in our community.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Disability Services) [10.04 am]: I thank the member for Mandurah for raising this issue. I join with him in congratulating Kaye De Brett and John Nicholson and the whole team of carers that I am familiar with and that I got to know quite well in the Mandurah region when they staged one of the regional "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" programs. That program was taken to the steps of Parliament House in Canberra this week by people from all over our nation who have the same concerns as the member for Mandurah and me since I became minister for this segment of the community.

I wish to read from a document that I tabled yesterday. This is part of a speech given by Lois Gatley, who this week was appointed as the new chair of the Carers Advisory Council. That advisory council will operate from the minister's office and it will have direct contact on a continuing basis with the minister. In her speech Lois said -

I am part of a large club, it is estimated there are 200,000 of us in WA alone. They are ordinary people doing extraordinary things for a baby, a child, an adult child, a frail parent, a sibling or, as in my case, a life partner, my husband Patrick.

The caring takes many forms according to the needs of the individual, the health condition, or the disability. In nice tidy sanitised language this depends on whether the individual has "*high support needs*" or "*low support needs*". Or the person requires help with '*personal care routines*' or '*enhancement of their social role*'.

This sanitised language means that the daily activity of people like me is disguised, almost negated as it reduces to a couple of words the 24 hour, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, year in year out, demand for tasks and actions none of you would want to ask another to do for you.

That clearly sums up what this grievance is all about. We need to recognise the more than 200 000 carers in WA who provide both informal or unpaid care to families, friends or neighbours. Carers are absolutely vital to the welfare-planning and decision-making processes, not only for these people but also for the government and for everybody throughout this nation. For instance, it has been conservatively estimated that each carer provides some \$50 000 a year worth of unpaid services. The aim of the "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" program is to highlight the economic cost and commitment of carers and to rhetorically ask who would do their job if they all stopped work tomorrow. In Western Australia we have recognised this and in a moment I will outline some of the contributions we have made.

I also thank the member for Kingsley. Last week she organised a forum of carers in her electorate and some 80 people turned up to a very successful morning tea. I was privileged to meet a group of people who have called themselves Grand Families. They are the grandparents of youngsters and kids, some just born - babies, right through to 18, 19 and 20 year olds - who, because their parents either cannot care for them or are dead, have been taken on by this group. These people have taken on children not only from their own generation but also a second generation. They are an amazing group of people and they are not recognised by government. One of the things that I would like to work towards with this group is making sure they get proper financial recognition. A foster carer is paid for looking after somebody else's child, but there is very little recognition of their own flesh and blood, particularly in the case of those people who are often on age pensions.

I will indicate what the government in this state has done. Over the past five years we have provided additional growth funding; it has increased to \$133 million. Over the same period the Australian government has provided a mere \$60 million - less than half of what we have provided. The 2004-05 budget contained the biggest ever funding increase in this area. I compliment the previous minister for her work in that regard and for assisting me in being able to lay down a budget this year that will provide over \$70 million worth of additional funding over the next four years. By 2007-08 the disability budget will have increased by more than 60 per cent to almost \$280 million. In some areas of respite the increase has been as high as 71 per cent. This year's recurrent growth funding from the state - this is the most important funding for carers as it is the money they get on a weekly basis - is \$13.256 million. Compare that with a measly \$1.726 million that comes from the coffers of the government in Canberra, which is continually taking more and more money!

I will now refer to specific services. Some \$5.6 million in growth funding will go to individual and family support - to the kind of people who walked the mile in their shoes yesterday. Some \$1.5 million will go to intensive family support, so people with a disability can remain in their own homes, which is the best place for them. In 2004-05 accommodation support initiatives received \$5.7 million of additional growth funding. Additional accommodation places were provided for 107 people. Twenty-six people will be placed in

accommodation options through more effective use of vacancies and so on. I will compare that quickly with what the federal government has done. This year the Western Australian government provided \$10.6 million extra for accommodation for older parents. From the federal government we received a mere \$490 000. The differences are unbelievable. The changes that are being made to the Centrelink arrangements for disabled people sell out people with high support needs at a time when this nation can afford to support the most disadvantaged. Cutting payments and fiddling with eligibility do not improve job prospects; they give no incentive to work. People who lose their legs do not grow them back. People who have an intellectual disability have an intellectual disability; that cannot be changed. Costello continually shifts taxpayers' costs at a state level. Again, another \$6.5 million in costs have been shifted to this state. Young people in nursing homes are forgotten by the federal government, despite what the state government does for them. I am proud of the Gallop government's record in this area, but it is not enough. We need to do more. Each and every federal member needs to walk a mile in those people's shoes.