

CHILDCARE SERVICES, CAMPBELL TOWN

[8.29 p.m.]

Mr HIDDING (Lyons) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope what I will raise this evening will encourage every other member for Lyons in this House, the Federal member of the House of Representatives, Mr Dick Adams, and all Tasmanian senators to get off their backsides and bring about a political solution for the people of Campbell Town and that region.

In 2004 the former Minister for Education, Ms Paula Wriedt, told the Campbell Town community that there was a possibility that existing childcare services could be extended and this would be the subject of discussion between her and the Esk District Office. This generated quite some excitement in the region. Three years later in 2007 Kevin Rudd promised to build up to 260 new childcare centres in Australia.

After the Rudd Government's election, the Campbell Town community duly lodged an expression of interest confident that they would be able to compete for one of the 260. In 2008 the Rudd Government also promised \$114 million to have 38 early learning and care centres operating in priority areas across Australia by 2010. Again, the Campbell Town community translated the childcare proposal into an early learning centre proposal to make their case even stronger.

In 2008 Minister David Bartlett met with parents in Campbell Town and told them that their combined early learning and childcare centre would be next in line after Beaconsfield where a new childcare and early learning centre was being co-located at the Beaconsfield Primary School. A letter by David Bartlett to one of the parents at that time stated:

'The Department of Education has already provided support to your proposal through the preparation of plans and agreement to the use of school land. You can be assured that I will support your proposal.'

In a personal note at the end of the letter, the Premier said that he would be supporting progress of the Campbell Town early learning centre with Maxine McKew and would keep them posted. A joint press release by Maxine McKew and David Bartlett in November 2008 stated that Beaconsfield was one of two priority areas identified in Tasmania. I firmly believe that the people of Campbell Town can be forgiven for thinking they were the other priority area in Tasmania, given the Premier's commitment to them, and the State Liberals are with them. Surely Campbell Town was it.

Mrs <Butler> *interjecting.*

Mr HIDDING - But they were wrong - and you do not do yourself any credit, member for Lyons, Mrs <Butler>, because you are at the heart of this.

Maxine McKew said in her speech to the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation in July 2008, five months earlier, that the other centre for Tasmania would be in the north-west. Looking through all the documents, we see evidence of a callous and apparently deliberate avoidance of telling the people of Campbell Town that they would not be getting that centre. We found that, up until April 2009, the parents of Campbell Town had been told by State and Federal Labor members that they supported a childcare centre for Campbell Town, they were second on the list of the Federal Government's rollout, but that was not true.

Mrs <Butler> - That was true - then ABC happened and the Federal Government had to spend \$23 million bailing them out.

Mr HIDDING - Local Federal Labor members are backtracking, with Dick Adams' office saying nothing was ever promised, nothing was ever put in writing and the childcare proposal is only an expression of interest. Mr Adams clearly led the people of Campbell Town astray with the complicity of the Lyons Labor members in this place.

Mrs <Butler> - No, that's not fair.

Mr HIDDING - Now, with no prospect of Federal funding for a childcare centre through either of its promises, David Bartlett has put a final nail in that coffin. Through his Launching into Learning program which will mean more kindergarten hours for children - a program we support, of course - we find that existing childcare services operated out of Campbell Town District High School's Kindergarten will be cut back to just one day a week.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the upshot is that after five years of promises by Labor, the parents of Campbell Town not only do not have a childcare centre, but they are having their existing high quality childcare hours severely cut by the Northern Midlands Council to just one day a week. This will have an enormous impact on parents who work in the local community. All they need is some capital funding to build an early learning centre which will cater for both

the Launching into Learning program and the additional kindergarten hours, but they also want a childcare centre.

The local community is prepared to help in any way they can with skills, labour and whatever, but without those capital funds we will find that many parents in this local community having to give up work in the middle of an economic crisis, particularly an area that has been subject to drought. These families have been doing it tough already. They do not need it any tougher. This community has raised \$3 000 since the community forum in April. They have had donations from local farmers and they have banded together because they desperately need childcare services in the community. I urge Premier Bartlett to honour his commitment to this community and work with them to find an immediate solution before childcare services are drastically cut.

The Northern Midlands Council are very good operators of child care in the area and I believe they would operate childcare services five days a week if the facilities were there to do that. Access to reasonable levels of child care these days is a basic right for working parents. This community deserves far more than being constantly strung along by Federal and State Labor members, and I include every single Labor member for that area in this disgraceful situation that has seen them drop to one day a week of child care in Campbell Town.

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[8.34 p.m.]

Mrs BUTLER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I would just like to retort. I think that was a very unfair attack on the Lyons members. The Federal Government had to spend \$23 million in rescuing ABC Learning Centres. Surely things have to change and I ask you to be reasonable in that circumstance. That was across Australia.

Mr Hidding - You have dropped to one day a week in Campbell Town.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mrs <BUTLER> - I was representing the Premier at a ministerial meeting when Minister McKew told us that the funds would no longer be there, as we had been led to believe, so that is what happened.

Mr Hidding - Your heart is in the right place. We now want to see some action from you.

Mrs <BUTLER> - I am on the committee. I have been solidly at every meeting. What are you doing about it, Mr Hidding?

Mr Hidding - How do you feel about this?

Mrs <BUTLER> - Are you actually there on the ground helping? Are you raising money? Are you listening to people? Are you sitting down with them, bringing them together with Bicheno and doing something about it?

Mr Hidding - Yes, we are listening to people. I have a whole pile of correspondence.

Mrs <BUTLER> - Well, I am. We are looking at other models and we will get a childcare centre there in some different form. It may not be what we had planned originally -

Mr Hidding - You've dropped to one day a week.

Mrs <BUTLER> - that is no longer available because the money is not there, but we will get there.

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[8.35 p.m.]

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass) - Mr Hidding has asked me to read in a letter from a lady at Campbell Town -

Mrs <Butler> - Are you the member for Lyons now?

Mr GUTWEIN - There is not enough time in the adjournment debate for Mr Hidding to make the points that he needs to make as well as read this letter in, so he asked me to do so.

This lady, a key stakeholder in the region, says:

'I am writing to inform you of the disgust and outrage that I feel regarding the child care situation in Campbell Town. On Friday 26 June, 2009 I was handed a letter by the staff of the Northern Midlands Mobile Child Care Unit stating that there will need to be a change to the child care availability as of 2010 as the school will need to use the Kindergarten building four days a week in 2010. This means that this valued service will need to cut down their availability to only one day a week (already only having two days a week is insufficient for the needs of our growing town).'

I will paraphrase the rest because there is a fair bit of information in it about people on the ground and what is occurring to them - have a listen to this. She says that her two-year-old daughter is cared for by five different carers every week just so that she is able to work. She says she has to try to explain to her child why she is going somewhere different every day, having absolutely no routine in place for her, and she goes on to say - as we all understand in this place - that routine is something that is very important in regard to the rearing of young children. It is absolutely heartbreaking.

Mr Hidding - Absolutely.

Mr GUTWEIN - She says it took her child a long time to settle in at the various places that she attends.

'The guilt that I feel is tremendous, but I wonder if this means anything to you'.

Well, I wonder if it does.

Mrs <Butler> - That's a very below-the-belt thing to say, Mr Gutwein.

Mr GUTWEIN - She continues:

'My personal situation is not unique. With the drought that our state has been suffering from, many wives have had to return to the workplace and child care has been the number one issue that has placed extra stress on these families. They are not deserving of this.'

This lady makes the point that if something is not done about this soon:

'... my husband and I may have to look at leaving the area and moving where there are proper child care facilities available. The implications of this are that the school will lose a teacher that lives locally ... and our business will more than likely close and this will mean that many people currently employed by us will be out of work. This is also bound to affect the local economy too as we support the town as much as possible.'

This is a dreadful situation and I am glad you are here to hear this -

Mrs <Butler> - I agree; that's why I'm working on it.

Mr GUTWEIN - and that we have the opportunity to raise the matter here.

Mr Hidding - You're presiding over a drop to one day a week.

Mrs <Butler> - I'm not. I'm on the committee - you're not doing anything, Mr Hidding.

Mr GUTWEIN - The letter goes on:

'We have seen many positive changes occur in the time that we have lived here and have enjoyed assisting this community to grow and to develop, but at the end of the day our Government must step in to help. ... Do not let us down.'

We, the State Liberals, are going to fight this abandonment of the Campbell Town region by Labor and we thank this hardworking mum for being prepared to send this in because obviously the message is not getting through to you.