

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - The honourable member for Braddon, Mrs Hollister, and I remind members that this is Mrs Hollister's inaugural speech and she will be heard in silence.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mrs HOLLISTER (Braddon) - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise to support the Labor Budget and will use this time to speak on several matters which both concern and interest me. Some of these matters have not received the budgetary allocation they so rightly deserve but I am hopeful that omissions will be redressed as soon as practicable. I am mindful of the need for financial budgetary restraint at this time and have no wish to incur further debt which will need to be paid by following generations.

At present in this State education is in a decline, and has been since 1982. During this period teachers have mounted a desperate campaign on behalf of children and morale is at an all-time low. The children and students of this State deserve better and the parents are being let down. I have said many times before - and it was mentioned again this morning - that an investment in education means an investment in the future of all Tasmanians. Sadly this has not been forthcoming due to the unsustainable debt level; money which should have been invested in education is being used to pay interest on borrowings incurred by the former Government. So where do I effect a change of direction in education over the next four years? Where should investment be directed?

The area of primary education is definitely a priority as it is in this sphere that skills, attitudes and knowledge are developed, and these provide the foundation for educational success and creativity. I believe that many of the problems students are experiencing today could be alleviated if the appropriate funding and resources were allocated to this vital area. I am not suggesting that we should deprive the secondary area of its existing funding, but recommend a substantial input at the Kindergarten to Grade 6 level. The benefits accrued would flow through to the secondary, higher school certificate, and tertiary levels and beyond.

I must make special mention of the early childhood area which is of utmost importance in the educational process. Children have their first experience of school during this time and arrive with a variety of needs and early experiences - or a lack of them. Full-time aides are essential during this period to assist the class teacher to provide quality, individualised programs.

I would also like to see a rationale of the admission policy to give schools more flexibility; children's advancement should be made in the best interests of the child rather than be based on chronological age or class size. Furthermore specialist subjects such as physical education, music and art are an integral part of the school curriculum and should be excluded from the school staffing quota. Naturally, these subjects should be taught by fully-qualified teachers in the respective areas.

The integration of children with disabilities into normal schools is to be encouraged. It is the most effective way of changing attitudes and prejudices and of providing the disabled child with an educational environment as close to normal as possible. However for integration to be a successful practice for the child, teacher and parents there are several prerequisites. These include adequate human resources ranging from aides to assist successful entry into normal school; resource teachers to provide program assistance to class teachers; through to the support resources of guidance officers, speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, should these be required. Opportunity should be available for teachers of disabled children to have in-service training. Small class sizes are also desirable and depend upon the severity of the child's disability.

Unfortunately these problems have been recognised but up to now have been given little more than lip-service. While applauding the concept of integration it must be realised that for some children it is not a viable proposition. This is particularly the case with severely, profoundly or multiply disabled children. There is still a need for special schools

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in this State and these schools are providing a caring learning environment which is fostering self-esteem and an enjoyment of life: the West Park and St Paul's special schools are excellent examples of this. I also enthusiastically support the early intervention programs which are providing direction for children at a very young age and assisting children to reach their full learning potential and physical capabilities.

Education is a life-long experience and I believe that funding to adult education programs in this State should be returned to its previous level. Adult education programs offer people of all ages the choice to further academic learning; to acquire new skills suitable for both business and leisure activities; and to make new acquaintances as well as to provide support for lecturing artists, writers and crafts people. To sum up thus far, we need an injection of resources, both human and material, especially to primary education and integration programs. Our students deserve it.

I would now like to turn my attention to the area of social infrastructure on the north-west coast; that is, the services which are provided to people in the region in response to community need. The problem here is that this need is not being addressed. We have a desperate need for a whole range of services such as: increased crisis intervention facilities; sexual assault counselling; provision of medium-term accommodation for families and women leaving shelters; group homes for people with physical and intellectual disabilities who require live-in supervision; facilities for respite care; more child-care positions; dental treatment for the unemployed and aged; and suitable accommodation for people with psychiatric or behavioural disabilities. Instead we have one crisis intervention unit, totally understaffed for the number of clients using it and placing huge demands on the overworked staff there.

Although statistics are difficult to obtain, it would appear that the north-west and west coasts have perhaps the highest incidence of domestic violence in the State. Many women experience difficulties in seeking assistance as well as finding suitable accommodation, particularly medium-term accommodation.

As well as this, there is a lack of facilities to handle after-care for sexual assault victims. At present there are limited volunteers and police officers working in this area but in many cases the victim is living in the same house as the perpetrator while waiting for the case to come to court. Instead of a healing process, this time is one of trauma.

A priority in the Burnie area is the provision of a group home for intellectually disabled adults. In many cases these people have been cared for by their parents and this is becoming increasingly difficult as the parents age. Lack of respite care in the north-west region is another example of neglect and when this care is required the only option is to travel to Rocherlea which is often already fully booked.

What cost will all these services be to the community? Unless some provision is made to assist with a solution, the eventual cost to the State may be much greater. The preventative approach is much more effective than the curative approach.

At this stage, I must acknowledge the effort provided by volunteer workers and organisations. I fear that with expanding workloads and more complex problems which are presenting themselves daily, particularly in the area of health and welfare, much of the activity that we take for granted will prove to be beyond the capacity of these people. Groups such as the MOVE group in Ulverstone, which voluntarily assists men overcoming violent emotions, and the Mersey-Leven Welfare Planning Association, a voluntary group identifying and wherever possible initiating action to meet community needs, are typical of these groups providing essential services at no cost. Perhaps we need to provide some professional development courses for these people or else provide infrastructure funding to enable the voluntary work to continue at the high standard of attention and service with which it has been delivered up to this time.

There seems to be a generally held belief in Tasmania that building physical structures is a way of securing electoral success. I would have thought that funding directed towards building societal and family structures, while not as electorally appealing, is what we as

leaders rather than politicians should be aspiring to. Monuments such as the proliferation of upgraded airports, hospitals and roads have consumed funding which should have gone into preventative care and support for women, children, families, the aged and disabled.

In that context I am dismayed that some members of parliament seem intent upon pursuing this lack of leadership and practised parochialism which has resulted in the neglect of basic health-care services in the north west. With my colleague, Mrs Milne, I congratulate the Minister for Health, Mr White, for having the courage to address this problem and other health issues throughout the State which have resulted in the drift of medical specialists from the north-west coast and the necessity for patients to travel long distances a sometimes interstate to secure what should be their right. The north-west coast needs a base hospital and the Ernst Young Report has identified Burnie as being the most appropriate site for equitable access from the far north west, the west coast and the eastern area. I hope the opportunity to secure votes will not stand in the way of what reason and necessity demand.

Youth unemployment in the north west is a critical problem. Whereas national figures for the fifteen to nineteen-year-old group show a decline in the unemployed, Tasmanian is reminiscent of the 1985-86 level with 20.5 per cent without jobs. Among the highest areas are the Heybridge-Emu Heights area in Burnie and at Wynyard. Why did we not hear anything about this from the previous Government and what has been done to help?

While I realise that there is no magic formula to ease the problem, there are some significant points I would like to make. School retention levels thankfully are improving providing additional learning opportunities for many students. I am hopeful that amalgamation of the three tertiary institutions will result in expanded external tertiary opportunities in the north-west region, providing further education without incurring the untenable expense of moving to live away from home.

Fundamental to the problem is the historic and cultural fact that many people in the north west have become dependent on resource-based industries to provide them automatically with jobs. As students completed Grade 10 they were actively or in some cases unconsciously given the message that they should follow their father either down the mine or into the mill. Tragically, while it has been apparent to the rest of the world for some time that to remain internationally competitive these industries needed to move from a labour-intensive base to a capital-intensive base - thus shedding jobs while maintaining productivity - has not yet penetrated the psyche of many people in the north west nor their elected representatives at local, State and Federal levels.

An example of this was my recent address to the north-west municipal region meeting where I outlined the need to look to enterprise-type employment or expansion of small business opportunities and an overcoming of the dependency on one particular manufacturing industry. The response was both predictable and, for the young people in the region, disappointing. The letter reads:

'Dear Mrs Hollister,

During discussion of your address to the Region last Friday, a majority of representatives decided that you should be advised that, whilst commending you on the promotion of small businesses within the State, it is doubtful that any substantial economic support would be forthcoming from such promotions.

However, should this be the case, it should be deemed a bonus to the proven benefits arising from existing and environmentally acceptable future industries within this Region.

The Regional body will be supporting and promoting these industries and respectfully request your support in these endeavours.

Yours faithfully,

SECRETARY

But I am most encouraged by the entrepreneurial and enterprising skills of many young people being developed within the education system. At Hellyer College students have developed computer software packages and are marketing and implementing these packages in schools and community organisations. Other students are developing small business and hospitality skills through a school-based catering initiative. At the Don College in Devonport physics students have initiated a program of assistance to disabled children by designing and modifying equipment that will improve the user's quality of life. Agriculture students at The Don College are experimenting with trials of exotic vegetables as well as examining new and alternative breeding programs for cattle. Tourism study students are gaining first-hand experience in the promotional side of the industry by producing brochures and package tours of the Devonport area.

In this context I find it exciting to approach the north-west mini-summit on employment that I have organised for next month. I look forward to being able to convey those ideas that will come from this regional meeting to the major Employment Summit in Hobart late next month.

In conclusion, the Independents campaigned on a platform of providing a high-quality environment for Tasmania and a high-quality lifestyle for its citizens and the people of Braddon have entrusted me with the task of securing those two very things for them. It will be a great challenge because in both those areas there is a great deal of work to be done.

Quality of life for me is that every young person has a right to be educated to his or her full potential; that the contribution of every person in paid or unpaid work is recognised and valued; that every mother can expect assistance with child-care and access to preventative health care and family counselling if necessary; that every disabled person is permitted to live in his or her own community with adequate support services; and that every elderly person is valued for his or her lifetime experience and given the community support in his or her declining years.

High-quality environment means clean air, clean water, uncontaminated rivers, non-polluted beaches and a recognition of the need to care for the land. Therein lies the challenge and I intend to respond to it to the best of my ability.

Members - Hear, hear.