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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 1981

ELECTORATE TALK

On a visit to South Australia at the weekend I was privileged to open a new swimming pool for the handicapped at Minda Homes in Adelaide. This pool will both serve therapeutic purposes and provide an avenue for recreation. The opportunities for rehabilitation offered by the Minda swimming pool are an example of the contribution being made throughout Australia by individuals, voluntary agencies, organisations and governments in an effort to assist handicapped and disabled Australians to realise their fullest potential in this, the International Year of Disabled Persons.

The Government has played a substantial part in encouraging and supporting these initiatives, for the Government's Liberal philosophy is one of concern for the well-being and fullest development of all people in our society. Commonwealth Government financial support for disabled and handicapped persons amounts to \$1.1 billion this financial year. Even though governments and the community are doing much more than was the case, there are still unfulfilled needs, and much yet remains to be done.

However, the 39% real increase in expenditure that has taken place since the 1975 Labor Budget illustrates the real and sympathetic commitment of this Government to the well-being of handicapped and disabled persons. A wide range of programmes are being funded by the Government, including invalid pensions, sheltered employment allowances, handicapped children's benefits, subsidies to non-profit organisations and local government bodies which provide facilities for physically and intellectually handicapped people, and assistance for the production and publication of Braille and audio books for the print handicapped.

The International Year for Disabled Persons is not just a "one-off" exercise. Its impact will be of more lasting value in helping to achieve greater understanding and more practical responses to the needs of handicapped people, and so far as the Government is concerned, our commitment to the cause of disabled persons will be a continuing one.

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There is growing support for less paternalistic or protective services, so that disabled people will have a greater measure of control over their own lives, and more freedom to pursue their own lives and interests in surroundings as normal as possible. I am confident that this progressive and responsible view will increasingly prevail from now on - and while further consolidation will be needed, I see this as a major achievement of the International Year for Disabled Persons.

The Government shares the view which is growing in the community that disabled people should be encouraged to develop their capacities to the fullest extent, that they should be enabled wherever possible and desirable, to live by themselves, or with their families, and to use community facilities as do the rest of us. Today, there is a widespread desire to see disabled people being encouraged to accept the challenges of everyday living to the fullest extent of their abilities. To enjoy a meaningful home life and participate in all social, creative or recreational activities is a right to which all people are entitled.

I believe that when a disabled person is prepared to live independently and wants to do so, that ought to be encouraged. The community must be prepared to meet each case on an individual basis - for without this response, the theme of the International Year for Disabled Persons - "full participation and equality" - will remain unfulfilled.

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