



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 18 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.13 p.m.): One of the surprising things about this Labor Budget is that, despite all the hoopla, it has actually reduced critical spending on mental health and hospital rebuilding projects across Queensland when compared with the coalition Budget, despite the massive increase in Medicare funding.

The coalition's successfully negotiated Medicare agreement has significantly boosted overall health funding in the Budget. This Health Minister is awash with money. She cannot cry poor, because the new coalition Medicare agreement has taken Queensland's hospital funding from \$4.3 billion to \$5.65 billion over the next five years. In Opposition, the Minister tried to criticise this in-principle agreement, saying that \$5.5 billion was somehow less than the \$4.3 billion Goss/Keating deal. It is interesting that when it came to signing on the dotted line, the new Minister did not back out, as she could have done. She grabbed it with both hands.

The Medicare funding boost, combined with massive increases in the past two coalition Health budgets, has greatly assisted the Labor Government in framing the Health budget. However, as I mentioned, the Labor Government has still cut \$6m from mental health funding announced in the coalition's Budget. The Labor Government has cruelly announced mental health funding of \$272m in the 1998-99 Budget—down from the \$278m in the coalition's 1998-99 Budget. It is extremely concerning that the Labor Government has chosen to reduce funding in such a critical area. There has been no explanation from the Minister for this cutback.

As for capital works spending, there is a \$26m cut to Queensland hospital redevelopments as compared with the coalition's program. A direct comparison between the last coalition Budget and the new Labor Budget shows reduced spending on a range of hospital rebuilding projects, including Nambour Hospital and Caloundra Hospital. What a surprise! The Labor Party came up to the Sunshine Coast a couple of weeks ago, boasting about a boost in funding to Nambour Hospital, including funds we had already announced for the 12 new acute mental health beds. Then it turns around in this week's Budget and announces a \$10m slashing of capital works hospital spending from the Sunshine Coast this year.

Mr Hamill: What a load of rot!

Miss SIMPSON: It is in the Budget papers. If the Treasurer has not noticed, Labor has taken \$10m off the Sunshine Coast hospital building program this year. We also know that funding for other programs on the Sunshine Coast has gone, such as for the Tewantin TAFE. So much for Mr Beattie's jobs program! Retribution for the removal of the Sunshine Motorway tolls is being felt, even in Nambour. An injection of \$10m into the Sunshine Coast's economy this year would have created a lot more jobs.

Contrary to the Beattie spin doctors, the Beattie Cabinet meeting in Nambour was not the second Cabinet meeting in Nambour in 40 years but in 12 years. Even during this Cabinet meeting and community deputations, Beattie minders were telling Sunshine Coast businesspeople when they asked for funding for projects that they would not get it because the coalition had taken the tolls off the Sunshine Motorway. The coalition kept its promise to remove the tolls—a promise that the Labor Party

broke. During the election campaign this year, the Labor Party promised to not penalise the Sunshine Coast for the coalition's decision to remove the Sunshine Motorway tolls.

The Labor Party lied again, because here we see another broken promise, with \$10m being cut from the Nambour and Caloundra Hospitals rebuilding program in this financial year. As for the lame excuse from those in the Labor Party that this was because the plans were not ready, do they really think that the people of the Sunshine Coast are stupid and that they will swallow that sort of Labor propaganda? Perhaps the Labor Party would like to explain how it then just happened to boost capital works spending in a number of Labor Party electorates. This issue is not dead; there is no justification for the cuts. The dramatic slow-down in building on the Sunshine Coast as a result of changes to the Health budget will cost Sunshine Coast jobs.

Today I wish to respond to a personal attack made on me by the member for Nicklin. I have always treated Peter Wellington with courtesy, even though I did not always agree with him. However, the language he used against me in a very personal attack in Parliament today throws out the window his calls to lift the standards of Parliament. I am very disappointed in Mr Wellington. A lot of people put their trust in him and, I admit, even I expected better of him. I am also disappointed that he continues to defend the Beattie Labor Government in words and actions, even when the whole of the Sunshine Coast is paying the price.

It is also sad that, under Mr Wellington's so-called new standards of politics, he claimed credit for other people's work, such as the funding of 12 new acute mental health beds at Nambour Hospital. Under the coalition, the staff had already been recruited and they were funded in the coalition's Budget.

The coalition increased recurrent health funding on the Sunshine Coast, apart from the Capital Works Program, by more than \$4m in this financial year. We do not yet know what the Labor Government has given to the Sunshine Coast in recurrent hospital funding, but I will always welcome an increase. I believe it is just cynical politics for a new MP to claim credit for programs that other people worked for, recruited staff for and funded.

Let us look at some of the other hospital capital works programs that have been set back under Labor. Princess Alexandra Hospital has been cut by a whopping \$22m this year, Royal Brisbane Hospital has been cut by \$4m and Mater Children's Hospital has been cut by \$19m. The Gold Coast Hospital has been cut by \$1m, and I have already mentioned the \$6m cut from Caloundra Hospital and the \$3.6m cut from Nambour Hospital. Toowoomba Hospital has been cut by \$4m, Townsville Hospital has been cut by \$10m, Rockhampton Hospital has been cut by \$3.5m and Redland Hospital has been cut by \$2.2m. Then there is Maryborough Hospital, where \$3m has been sliced from the capital works program for this year. It was disturbing to hear in Parliament this week the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, threatening to give Maryborough a second-rate hospital. I got the clear impression, listening to the arrogant taunts of the Minister, that she was threatening Maryborough residents that if they did not leave her alone then—watch out—they would get a second-rate hospital.

Last week, I attended that meeting of 1,500 very angry Maryborough and district residents who lambasted the Minister for breaking her pre-election promise not to downgrade services at the hospital. The people came from all walks of life and all political persuasions—yes, even the Labor Party. I do not believe they will ever forget that this is a Minister who is still unrepentant over her decision to downgrade the intensive care services and associated services at the Maryborough Base Hospital.

The coalition had set aside \$17m for the Maryborough Hospital redevelopment. I share the fears of the Maryborough residents that this Minister is trying to cut the guts out of the rebuilding program and that at the end of the day they will be left with a cottage hospital that does not come up to the standard of a regional base hospital. We have already seen a significant slowdown in the spending allocation for Maryborough. Will we ever see all the money spent under the Labor Government? We will be watching. As I have outlined, there has been a whopping \$26m cutback in capital works spending for hospitals under Labor, which makes an absolute mockery of Mr Beattie's claim about creating jobs in Queensland.

I want to move on to the Budget as it applies to women's services. Labor's Budget has slashed funding for a \$1.75m women's jobs program, demolished a \$14.7m women's services package and weakened women's policy. The axing of the coalition's Women 2000 program is hypocrisy from a Government promising to create employment and is just one of the many cuts to women's services in the Budget. Labor has also failed to deliver on its election promise to raise domestic violence funding by \$2m a year. It has also cut funding to new eating disorders strategies by half.

Labor has taken apart the four-year \$14.7m women's services package which provided for child care, education and training, domestic violence prevention and eating disorders initiatives. Labor's Minister for Women's Policy, Judy Spence, has surrendered control over these key initiatives to a range of line departments where they will receive little or no attention. This package was the cornerstone of the coalition's programs for women and would have been delivered in a coordinated fashion. Now Labor has abandoned the package and weakened policy coordination in one go.

Labor is ploughing millions of dollars into a bloated women's bureaucracy where staff levels will go up by 33% in a year. The estimated non-labour operating costs for the Office of Women's Policy has blown out from \$0.89m actual in 1997-98 to \$3m in 1998-99, despite the new office offering no new initiatives for women. Labor is heading back to big-spending, big Government, which talks about attracting the women's vote but does not live up to its rhetoric. Premier Peter Beattie and Ms Spence made a lot of promises to women in the election campaign but have abandoned them in office in favour of funding the bureaucracy.
