



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 12 November 1998

### QUEENSLAND HEALTH

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House notes with alarm the health crisis overtaking Queensland's public health system, including—

mass meeting of combined unions on 6 November at Wolston Park Hospital protesting against job cuts under Labor;

public rally planned for Gold Coast Hospital on 29 November protesting against a lack of funding and public attacks by the Health Minister on medical staff at the hospital;

plans to slash 150 nurses from the Royal Brisbane Hospital by Christmas due to budget blow outs;

petition by staff working at the psychiatric unit in Townsville expressing anger at cuts to nursing staff;

public outrage in Townsville at Health Minister Edmond's plan to downgrade the status of the proposed North Queensland Medical School which was announced by the Coalition;

escalating problems in Maryborough with a high level hospital staff committee established by Queensland Health rejecting Health Minister Edmond's redevelopment plan announced for Maryborough Base Hospital;

\$13m shortfall in funding for the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment promised by the Health Minister but not provided in the budget; and

community outrage in Gympie at plans by the State Government to close the surgical ward at the hospital on weekends."

This is a sad and sorry list. What is so astounding is that it took only a few months of having a Labor Health Minister to see the public health system in Queensland fall back in crisis. It is a tragedy that Queensland public hospitals are gripped by this turmoil and that we are seeing industrial action and staff anger exploding across the State—industrial action, health disputes and the worry that people working in the system are expressing because they do not have confidence in this Health Minister.

Queensland Health has been conducting crisis talks with combined health unions to try to stem the growing industrial action or threats of industrial action across Queensland. In five short months, we have seen Queensland public hospitals gripped with the same crisis that occurred during six years of the Goss Labor Government. We did not see these things happening under the coalition but, after only a few months under this particular Minister and this Labor Government, the distress that is being expressed by people is a real tragedy.

Let us look at the issue of the bed closures at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. It is a great concern for the staff who are working on those floors and the people who are trying to be admitted into that hospital. The closure of 24 beds at the Royal Brisbane Hospital further highlights this growing crisis under this Minister. The closure of beds across six medical wards is due to the hospital being \$3m over budget in the first quarter of this financial year. That closure of 24 beds is equivalent to an entire ward, but this is a ward that has been closed by stealth because it is spread throughout the hospital. Once again, this highlights the difficulties for staff who have to try to service the needs of their patients who

are spread throughout the hospital. Patients are now missing out on a bed at the State's largest public hospital and are being kept waiting to be admitted for unacceptable periods because Mrs Edmond is incapable of running the health system. And there is more bad news to come under this Minister. Unfortunately, the sad and sorry tale is only just starting.

Minister Edmond's weak and feeble attempt to blame the coalition is absolute nonsense and does not stand up. We are now three months into the Budget of the Beattie Labor Government, and Minister Edmond's own Ministerial Portfolio Statements stated that the coalition's last Health budget was balanced. It was the Budget papers of this Labor Government that clearly stated that the coalition's last Health budget was balanced. The tragedy is that the Queensland Health Department is awash with money, with a massive 15% increase in hospital funding under the new Medicare agreement negotiated by the coalition, but this Health Minister has not put the money where it is needed. There is absolutely no excuse for the gross mismanagement of Queensland's public hospitals that has occurred under Health Minister Edmond.

We have seen the Commonwealth health agreement increase funding for hospitals from something like \$4.3 billion up to \$5.6 billion, which is the largest amount that Queensland has ever received from the Commonwealth. That was quite an outstanding achievement for the previous Health Minister, particularly with regard to the \$100m bonus initiatives that came Queensland's way out of a potential bonus of \$120m right across Australia. Queensland scooped the pool and took \$100m of that. Here we have this incredible increase in the Medicare funds and we also have bonus funds of over \$100m, yet we do not see this Health Minister spending the money where it needs to be spent or dealing with the issues that are concerning our public hospitals, and the Royal Brisbane Hospital—that great hospital here in Brisbane—has patients who are left queuing and waiting for hours when there would be no need if this Minister was capable of managing her department.

The Beattie Labor Government inherited the best public hospital system in Australia and, in just five months, this Minister has undone all of the coalition's good work, and that is a tragedy to watch. Let us talk about the Cairns Base Hospital. The Beattie Labor Government has conned the people of Cairns into believing an extra \$17.9m announced for the Cairns Base Hospital was not in the Budget. The September Budget of the Beattie Labor Government shows a total of \$94.65m has been allocated to the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment, compared with \$90m in the coalition's May Budget. Despite the Beattie Labor Government's announcement of a \$17.9m increase in funding, the real increase revealed in the Budget papers is only \$4.65m.

Every other hospital project listed in the Capital Works Program has its total estimated cost listed in the official Budget papers. I will repeat that for those Labor members from the Cairns area: every other hospital project listed in the Capital Works Program has its total estimated cost listed in the official Budget papers. However, when it comes to Cairns, if one looks at the Budget papers that the Minister tabled in this Parliament that she was caught out with in the Estimates process, one will find that she clearly did not include it with the other hospitals in those tables.

Mr Beattie and Mrs Edmond have completely misled the people of Cairns. It is an undeniable fact that the extra \$17.9m has not been funded by the Labor Government. If the funding is not in the Budget, if it is not in the tables that I have referred to, then it is not real.

**Mrs Edmond:** They're there. You can't find them. Even when we gave you the pages, you couldn't find them.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I would be quite happy to refer the Minister to the section where that funding clearly has been omitted. Once again, she is misleading the House. Mrs Edmond's claims about extra money for the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment are a complete fraud. Her performance as Health Minister has been nothing short of appalling. She is lurching from crisis to crisis; she is clearly not up to the job; and, as we have seen with regard to the people from the hospitals speaking out, public health staff are actually willing to put their names on petitions, as we have seen in Townsville. That is an amazing situation. They are distressed about the downgrading of the psychiatric services at Townsville. The fact that they have had the courage to put their names on a petition and speak out speaks loads for their commitment and also their concern about the Townsville Hospital.

Let us talk about Maryborough, where more than 1,000 people were forced to march in the streets to keep their intensive care unit. We saw that something like 10,000 people put their names on petitions.

**Mr Johnson:** We had the Premier go up there and reverse the decision.

**Miss SIMPSON:** That is right; the Premier went up to try to pick up the pieces of the mess that his Health Minister left.

**An Opposition member:** He is up there holding her hand.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Apparently he is still holding her hand because the problem has not gone away and people are still extremely concerned about what is happening with the hospital. The Minister

keeps asking people to trust her. But no-one could ever trust her after Labor's broken promises in Maryborough.

The people of Maryborough spoke out very clearly. I attended the meeting at which about 1,500 people packed the Maryborough hall. I saw their anger and their despair at the downgrading of the hospital, because they were promised that this would not happen under a Labor Government, but that is exactly what has been happening. They saw it with the moves to downgrade their intensive care unit. They are also now being told that this Government is not going to give them the money for the hospital redevelopment that they deserve—that they need—to take that hospital into the future.

Time expired.

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