



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 16 September 1998

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR HEALTH

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

"That this House censures the Minister for Health for breaking an election promise to retain all existing specialist services at the Maryborough Base Hospital including a fully maintained stand-alone intensive care unit, high-risk obstetrics and high-risk paediatrics."

The Beattie Labor Government's decision to downgrade the Maryborough Base Hospital is the greatest act of political treachery ever witnessed in Queensland politics. The Labor Party went to the recent State election proclaiming a policy of maintaining the Maryborough Hospital as a major regional hospital. The Deputy Premier, Mr Elder, said in the Fraser Coast Chronicle in July 1997 that he had told the district health council chairman in Maryborough "not to move one piece of equipment, transfer one staff member, downgrade one service or remove any resource from the hospital."

In Opposition, Mr Beattie, Mr Elder and Mrs Edmond promised on many occasions to maintain all existing services at the Maryborough Base Hospital. They have broken those promises and that is why the people of Maryborough are so angry. Mr Elder also told the people of Maryborough in July 1997 that they would have to fight "tooth and nail" to keep their hospital at its present level. They did have to fight tooth and nail. They had to fight tooth and nail to stop the Labor Party from downgrading their hospital!

The Labor Party's gross political treachery in Maryborough prompted the local branch of the Labor Party to call for an urgent meeting with the Premier. The local branch president said that branch members were "dismayed and disappointed" over the loss of the intensive care unit and the high-risk birthing facilities. The local branch of the Labor Party believes that local and State bureaucrats are running the health agenda in their region.

What a startling admission from the Labor Party! Even the Maryborough branch of the Labor Party knows that Mrs Edmond, the Health Minister, is not running the show. In fact, the current Health Minister could not even run a bath. Mrs Edmond was forced to attend a public meeting last week, only to offend more than 1,500 local Maryborough residents who attended. Claims by the Health Minister and the Premier that this issue has been politically motivated are completely false and represent a disgraceful attack on the residents of Maryborough.

In an unprecedented move, the four local Lions Clubs wrote to the Premier saying—

"As you are no doubt aware, Lions Clubs are in no way politically motivated, nor are any of its members allowed to engage in any activities of this nature. We are involved in the community in which we serve, and are obliged to take an active interest in the civic, cultural, social and moral welfare of our community. Because of the current fiasco taking place at the Maryborough Base Hospital we wish to render our strongest disapproval of your Government's action in this regard.

Members of the Lions Club of this region attended the meeting with your Minister on Thursday, 10 September at the Maryborough City Hall to try to ascertain what exactly the Government was doing or intended on doing to the Maryborough Base Hospital. This meeting turned out to be an insult to the people of this region. The questions that were asked of your Minister were mainly answered by a public servant and the general consensus of opinion was

that the Minister was quite ill-informed of the importance that this hospital renders to our community. Promises are given and promises are broken, untruths abound and hospital staff are treated in a very unprofessional manner."

At the heart of this issue is the keeping of a promise made to the people. We have heard much from the Premier about the need for integrity in politics so that people can once again trust politicians.

The decision by the Health Minister to downgrade the Maryborough Base Hospital is a betrayal of local Maryborough and district residents. It is the breaking of a clear election promise. Despite Mr Beattie's monumental weekend backflip, the people of Maryborough still do not believe the Health Minister or the Labor Government.

One Maryborough mother who met with Mr Beattie to discuss the closure of the paediatric unit at the hospital is still concerned about care provided for her young child, who has a complex congenital heart disease. This mother raised concerns that on Tuesday and Wednesday evening of last week wards at the hospital were closed and equipment was removed via the back entrance in linen vans while Mrs Edmond met with residents in another part of the hospital grounds and repeatedly told them that they were the victims of a mischievous campaign of misinformation by local politicians.

This Maryborough mother said that the so-called upgrade announced by the Health Minister consisted of the closure of the intensive care unit and the 24-hour accident and emergency facilities, the amalgamation of paediatric beds into general medical and surgical wards and the removal of approximately 70% of all obstetric cases to the newly built Hervey Bay Hospital.

When the Opposition raised this mother's concerns in Parliament today the Premier implied that she was lying. The Health Minister, and now the Premier, owe this local resident an apology. This mother is genuinely concerned that the Labor Government wants to place children in adult surgical and medical wards. She has discussed her concerns with the Premier and obviously, in view of the fact that she has written to the Premier after their meeting, she is still concerned. Mr Beattie has again this morning refused to give a guarantee that the paediatric unit at the Maryborough Base Hospital will remain open.

If the Health Minister had been willing to say sorry—to admit that she had got it wrong—and to apologise to the people of Maryborough for breaking an election promise she would not have faced as much anger as she did in Maryborough last week. She would not have continued to cause the very fear that still motivated about 1,000 residents to march in the streets of Maryborough this week after Mr Beattie had made his announcement of the Government's backflip. The people of Maryborough are still extremely worried because they do not trust this Labor Government.

However, not only can the Minister not humble herself to admit that she was wrong and that it was a mistake to break an election promise, but incredibly she is still maintaining that she was not downgrading the hospital services despite all the very obvious evidence.

I have a copy of the hospital's memorandum which very clearly says that acute patients were to bypass Maryborough for Hervey Bay under the Minister's Health policy. This memorandum was issued on 9 September 1998—

"It needs to be realised that surgical and anaesthetic support is not available on an emergent basis and patients with acute surgical illness"——

Mrs Edmond: Be honest—for three days.

Miss SIMPSON: Be honest, you have been caught out. I will keep quoting from this memorandum—

"It needs to be realised that surgical and anaesthetic support is not available on an emergent basis and patients with acute surgical illness or impending respiratory failure should not be admitted to this service area. These patients should be stabilised, incubated if required and transferred to Hervey Bay Hospital. In addition, patients requiring temporary pacemaker insertion and cardiac patients requiring intensive care support should be transferred to Hervey Bay Hospital. Patients with sepsis and/or haemodynamic instability should be transferred to Hervey Bay Hospital."

There was nothing in the memo about it being temporary. The Minister is seeking to mislead the House again. There is no doubt that people do not trust you. Mrs Edmond is still berating Maryborough residents—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will address the Minister by her title.

Miss SIMPSON: The Minister for Health is still berating Maryborough residents and saying that they got it wrong—it was not her. It is this lack of repentance and care for the people that is continuing to worry the people of Maryborough. Many other communities are now worried about how the bureaucrats are going to walk all over this Minister. How can we trust a Minister who will not listen to the

people and who will not own up to her mistakes and admit that she has broken an election promise? I was present on the night that the Minister berated the residents of Maryborough. The town undertaker got up and had his say about what he thought of the Minister's treatment of the town. Doctors and nurses also got up and rebutted what the Minister was trying to say from the podium.

Time expired.
