



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 12 November 1998

**HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (5.46 p.m.): I appreciate the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate tonight. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join with you in adding some gender equity to the debate tonight. There are at least two SNAGs in the House.

This legislation provides proof—if ever proof were needed—that Labor never changes its ways. Although it has dressed itself up with media management, spin doctors and the manipulation of information, the legislation clearly illustrates that the Government is the same as Labor Governments we have seen in the past. That is illustrated in three ways.

Firstly, the inclusion of issues dealing with the structural power of a department as big as the Health Department in a Bill that also deals with very important public health concerns is typical of the Government's attempts to try to sneak through a major change that has been disguised as a small adjustment to something that is not considered to be terribly important. The whole issue of making the senior officer in the Health Department a bureaucrat rather than a practical person is symbolic of the approach that Labor has had to the Health Department right down the line. The same philosophy has been adopted throughout the health system. Practical people are being sidelined in favour of bureaucrats, departmental people and managers. There is a huge difference between managers and health professionals.

Tonight I acknowledge the great work done by the practical people in the hospital system, who every day have to battle because of shortages of facilities, funds and staff. They have to provide the services that the Health Department must provide. They have a completely different approach to the provision of health services from that of professional managers. It is distressing to see more and more professional managers being given control over the activities of these practical people. That philosophy is being taken right to the very top of the department in this legislation. The necessity of having a health professional occupying that position is being taken away. Health professionals are being replaced by managers with completely different approaches to the job.

Our health care system should not be, and can never be, a corporate entity. It is about people. It is not so much about profits, balance sheets, numbers and all of those things that managers do so well. It is about caring for people and providing care to people in need. That role is best performed by health professionals—people who are more concerned about the human element rather than the financial element and people who are concerned about people rather than the latest management theory. This change that the Labor Government is typically trying to sneak through hidden underneath Pap Smear and Cancer Registers, which are both perfectly good, is typical of the approach being taken in the Health Department right across the State. It is a system that has not worked in the past, it is a system that did not work the last time Labor was in Government, and it is a system that is not working now. There are plenty of examples up and down the State that show that this system is not working now.

The power crisis at the Townsville General Hospital is only one example of the gross mismanagement of the health system we are seeing through the replacement of health professionals with professional managers. Recently, Townsville General Hospital staff were forced to use hand pumps to provide oxygen to patients after a power blackout in the hospital's intensive care unit. The hospital power crisis was completely unacceptable. It required immediate action from the Minister for Health. It is

horrifying that in this day and age Queensland patients, their families and staff could be subjected to this situation. The Minister's reaction was to simply fob off the crisis as something that happens from time to time. No doubt that was the advice provided to her by her management-oriented departmental staff. It is a response that would be more at home in a factory than in a hospital. The hospital power crisis in Townsville is not normal. It is not acceptable in a health-care situation. It is Third World health care and it is completely unacceptable. Queensland Health is already sliding into crisis under the Beattie Labor Government.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! The member for Townsville!

**Mr SEENEY**: Thank you for your help, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Queensland now has a Health Minister who is well and truly out of her depth. If the Beattie Labor Government cannot guarantee a basic service such as power supplies to hospitals, obviously it should not be running the State.

In addition, psychiatric nursing staff at the Townsville General Hospital are worried that nursing staff cutbacks are heralding the return of the infamous Ward 10B. In an unprecedented move, 95% of staff working in the psychiatric unit have signed a petition conveying their concerns about reductions in nursing staff. It is completely unacceptable that these staff numbers have been reduced in this way in Townsville. A plan by Brisbane bureaucrats to reduce psychiatric unit staff numbers was rejected previously by the coalition. It was a plan that was put to the coalition by management-oriented departmental bureaucrats, and it was rejected. It has been accepted by this Minister and this Government. It is totally unacceptable.

Mrs Edmond is nothing more than a puppet of the bureaucrats. She should be listening to the front-line staff rather than the management-oriented bureaucrats. That is the third feature which is so typical of this Labor Government and has been so typical of Labor Governments in the past—the return of puppet Ministers who are directed by departmental bureaucrats who recycle propositions that have been rejected until they are finally accepted by puppet Ministers. We have a puppet Health Minister. Mrs Edmond has proven to be a weak Health Minister and is being walked over by Brisbane Health bureaucrats.

If we are serious about getting more doctors in north and western Queensland—and that is a big problem—we have to start educating them locally. That brings me to the subject of the North Queensland Medical School—another area in respect of which the present Health Minister has been walked over by Health Department bureaucrats. North Queenslanders are sick and tired of southern academics and Brisbane bureaucrats telling them what is best for their communities. The Queensland coalition fast-tracked the establishment of a north Queensland undergraduate medical course through the James Cook University.

I look forward to support from the very few Labor members who come from north Queensland. We have to realise that most of the members who sit on the Government side of the House come from Brisbane. There are a few from the north, and I acknowledge the member for Townsville and the member for Cairns. I look forward to support from those Government members who come from north Queensland in respect of the establishment of an undergraduate medical course at the James Cook University. However, I fear that they will be rolled in another of their infamous factional deals.

I return to the issue of the North Queensland Medical School. In May 1998 a working party involving Queensland Health, the Commonwealth Government and James Cook University recommended that an undergraduate course be established in Townsville. North Queensland has plenty of people with the drive and ability to make this a reality. Townsville and north Queensland school leavers deserve an opportunity to study medicine at an undergraduate course in their region. The Minister is failing to represent the health interests of the people of Townsville and north Queensland. The members of the Government from Townsville and north Queensland are failing to represent the interests of the people in their constituencies. This is an appalling performance from the Health Minister.

The Brisbane bureaucrats are being allowed to run the health system with no input from the practical front-line hospital staff—the practical people in local communities. In five short months we have seen Queensland's public hospitals returned to the crisis that occurred under six years of the Goss Labor Government. Already, waiting lists for elective surgery are blowing out. Despite the best efforts of the information manipulators and media managers, hospital waiting lists are blowing out and hospital staff are angry about funding cuts being introduced by the Beattie Labor Government. This Health Minister is not up to the task of running Queensland's health system. She is well and truly out of her depth and should be removed.

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