



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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QUEENSLAND HEALTH

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment that was moved by the member for Tablelands, which is an extension of the motion moved by the member for Maroochydore. The amendment that has been moved by the Minister for Health is one of the most dishonest documents I have seen in my short time in this House. If I had time I would address each of the points in the amendment, but I will devote the short space of time I have to the dot point that deals with the Maryborough Base Hospital. The Minister's performance in relation to the Maryborough Base Hospital was probably the most dishonest act that this Health Minister has perpetrated in a long list of dishonest acts. The ongoing community anger about the Minister's downgrading of the Maryborough Base Hospital highlights the gross mismanagement of Health under Labor and gives the complete lie to the amendment that was moved by the Minister for Health tonight.

Shortly after Labor came to Government, we saw the Minister attempt to close the intensive care unit, the 24-hour accident and emergency unit and other critical hospital services. The Minister sought to close those services despite promising before the election not to do so. The community in Maryborough fought against that downgrading. The Health Minister was forced into the most embarrassing backdown we have ever seen. However, the Beattie Labor Government is continuing to downgrade specialist services at the Maryborough Base Hospital. Only this week the coalition released details from the current guidelines for the Maryborough Base Hospital casualty department, which state—

"Beginning 14 November 1998 during day hours there will not be a surgeon on duty at Maryborough Base Hospital."

Mrs EDMOND: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. There will now be a full-time specialist at Maryborough that, except for a couple of hours, there never was before.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: The guidelines instruct staff to telephone the Hervey Bay Hospital and talk to the surgeon on call. Staff are also instructed not to panic. "Don't panic", the guidelines say, "if the surgeon is not on site." After being exposed, the Minister has been forced to now employ another surgeon. Her dishonesty has been exposed again. Health Minister Edmond is continuing to mislead the people of Maryborough and continuing to mislead this House by claiming in her amendment that existing specialist services are being expanded at the Maryborough Base Hospital. What absolute dishonesty! Time and time again, staff are raising issues of concern about the ongoing downgrading of services at the Maryborough Base Hospital. Mrs Edmond continues to deny that downgrading, but internal hospital documents prove conclusively that services are still being cut. The Minister's performance has been absolutely woeful. She is continuing to break promises to the people of Maryborough. She is continuing to mislead this Parliament.

Brisbane bureaucrats are being allowed to run the health system with no input from front-line hospital staff or local communities. Mr Beattie's appointment of another Brisbane bureaucrat to oversee the Maryborough Base Hospital redevelopment proves that he, too, has lost confidence in Mrs Edmond. However, the appointment shows that the Beattie Labor Government is still not listening.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Would the member please refer to the members by their correct title: the Premier, the Minister for Health.

Mr SEENEY: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. The appointments show that the Beattie Labor Government is still not listening to the people of Maryborough. Maryborough does not need another Brisbane bureaucrat telling the community what is best for them. Maryborough does not need further downgrading of its hospital facilities. The people of Maryborough want and deserve the specialist medical services they have always had at their hospital; they do not need lies from the Minister.

Also of concern is the fact that the Maryborough Base Hospital has lost its stand-alone paediatric unit as part of the Labor Government's downgrading of the hospital's services. A stand-alone paediatric unit is critical to ensure an isolation facility for children in the district. Maryborough parents have personally raised with the Premier the need for a stand-alone unit; however, those pleas have fallen on deaf ears. The promises have come to nothing. The Labor Government is still not providing the people of Maryborough with the hospital services they deserve.

Other elements of the Labor Government's downgrading include a reduction in bed numbers from the 120 beds announced by the coalition to 80 beds under Labor; scrapping of plans to redevelop the mortuary; refusal to aircondition allied health areas; and the removal of kitchen facilities at the hospital, which will reduce jobs in the local community. Staff are extremely concerned about basic problems, such as drains blocking up, which cause them to have to work in very unhygienic conditions. The Labor Government's performance at the Maryborough Base Hospital has been an absolute disgrace. It is even a greater disgrace for the Minister to come into this House tonight and move an amendment that suggests that services are being expanded. Mrs Edmond is still failing to represent the people of Maryborough.
