



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION; DR M. SCOTT-YOUNG

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): I rise to speak in this Matters of Public Interest debate in relation to the attack on our public health system. Four months into a new Labor Government and already the AMA, the "painters and doctor's union", is putting the politics back into the health debate. It is time to take politics out of health and place the focus where it belongs: back on the patients. For two years under the coalition Government, the current AMA leadership has lain doggo, but now that there is a Labor Government back in town it has come out of its self-induced coma. The reason for that, and the reason that it has always ever been, is that Labor is committed to restoring and enhancing the public hospital system.

The Goss Labor Government started the \$1.5 billion Hospital Rebuilding Program, because for decades under previous coalition Governments the public hospital system had been neglected. Because the AMA had a cosy relationship with the Liberal Party—in fact, it controlled most of the preselections—they let public hospitals deteriorate. Of course, the AMA wants people in private hospitals because that is where its leadership makes its money. I remember that, when the Premier was the Health Minister, the Gold Coast AMA leadership was always thumbing through the coalition campaign manual looking for new ways in which to attack the Labor Government's health funding on the Gold Coast. Yet when the coalition came to office and a Dr Charles Denaro at the Gold Coast Hospital raised some concerns about that hospital, what happened? Dr Denaro was moved out of that hospital! The AMA was silent while that action took place.

It is time to consider a few facts in relation to the Gold Coast Hospital. Under my friend "Headlines" Horan, the previous coalition Government allocated simply \$750,000.

Mr HORAN: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments that Dr Denaro was moved objectionable and offensive and I ask them to be taken back. Any move by Dr Denaro was done of his own accord.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr HORAN: I found offensive the insinuation that the doctor was forcibly removed.

An honourable member: By whom?

Mr HORAN: By the previous coalition Government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is still not a point of order. Unless it is personally offensive to you and you are named, you cannot take exception to it.

Mr MICKEL: The fact of the matter is that, after Dr Denaro raised those concerns, he was no longer at that hospital. If that causes some sensitivity to the honourable gentleman, so be it. That is where the cards lie. Dr Denaro raised the concerns and almost a month later Dr Denaro was not there. That is the fact of the matter.

The other fact of the matter is that under the coalition Government that hospital received only \$750,000 for activity growth. On top of that, the old health tax that the member for Toowoomba South was going to bring in was going to tear money out of the recurrent funding for the Gold Coast Hospital along with the funding for all the other hospitals that were being rebuilt. That tax would have torn

money out of funding for doctors and nurses. What did the AMA say about that? Absolutely nothing! They were lying doggo the whole time. That was typical of the AMA.

In the 1998-99 Labor Budget—the one just brought down—the Gold Coast Hospital received more than \$136.8m, and there is extra money still to be allocated for specific programs there such as the HIV and AIDS programs. But even without this extra money, that is a record allocation for the Gold Coast Hospital. It is almost \$6.2m more for new and enhanced services than was allocated under the previous coalition Government, which had five members representing the Gold Coast, including the Premier, and yet——

A Government member: And nothing for them.

Mr MICKEL: Nothing for them. This Government has one member, who is a Minister, representing the Gold Coast, and she has delivered extra funds for the Gold Coast Hospital. Those extra funds include \$2.5m for activity growth.

Let me advise the House that, in the first four months of this financial year, there has been a 14.8% increase in elective surgery compared with the same time last year. Under Labor, elective surgery procedures have increased. Those people who had been suffering under the coalition Government are now receiving first-class medical treatment at the Gold Coast Hospital because, despite the enormous problems and the unfunded promises that were the legacy of the coalition Government, the Beattie Labor Government has increased funding for the Gold Coast Hospital.

The AMA leadership on the Gold Coast has behaved in a most disgraceful way in its attacks on the current Government. Every other interest group has acknowledged that the recent Labor Budget was essentially the same as the coalition's last Budget. As we know, in many instances it was better. On Budget day, every group acknowledged that except the AMA. The most self-serving of them all has been Dr Matthew Scott-Young. He is a locum orthopaedic consultant who resigned on 28 October, effective immediately. He claimed that his reasons for his resignation were multifactorial. I am sure that none of the reasons would have been good enough for the 11 patients, who between 5 November and 3 December were booked in for surgery by him, and whom he has let down. When Dr Scott-Young resigned, effective immediately, all of those operations had to be cancelled.

Members could imagine the inconvenience and mental anguish that those 11 people and their families suffered after being told that their operations had been cancelled. Those people are like those in my electorate who are facing surgery. They are forced to take time off work, they are away from their businesses, and they must make arrangements for the care of their children. In other words, a whole series of lives are affected by surgery. However, I commend the staff of the Gold Coast Hospital who, in relation to this matter, are currently rescheduling all of their operations.

As for Dr Scott-Young, I say that this is the kind of schoolboy stuff we get when a yuppie is shoehorned into the AMA. I will tell the House about Dr Scott-Young. His petulant and arrogant resignation followed formal requests from the medical superintendent on 30 July and 21 October this year in which Dr Scott-Young was asked to respond to allegations raised by patients, clients and staff. I understand that one of those claims, the alleged assault of a patient, is currently before the Health Rights Commission. Dr Scott-Young is also accused of aggressively and inappropriately harassing a patient, who was in a shower, over the patient's complaint about the cancellation of surgery. It is alleged that the doctor intimidated a patient's relative in contacting her by telephone to reprimand her for complaining about some aspect of care for a family member. Furthermore, staff complaints about Dr Scott-Young's bullying behaviour in theatre has meant that nursing management has had difficulty rostering a full complement of theatre staff for Dr Scott-Young's lists. Having blaggarded the hospital and the Government, Dr Scott-Young owes a full explanation to the public for his behaviour.

The Gold Coast Hospital is a good hospital. In fact, it is a great hospital, and we are proud of it. It has problems, but the current Health Minister is working on ways to resolve them. The AMA leadership should be looking at ways in which we can work through this together. I challenge the AMA leadership to put their coalition preselection tickets back in their pockets and work with the Government for the good of the community.

As a Government, we deal with many groups that are not of our political persuasion, and we do so in a mature and cooperative fashion. Surely to goodness we do not need to return to the shroud-waving exercises in which the AMA leadership indulged during the early 1990s. The health debate has moved on and the AMA leadership should move on with it. Just because the coalition Government gave the AMA \$12,000 to run a meeting does not mean that it has to be forever in the coalition's pocket. It is time that the AMA leadership understood that there are a lot of decent doctors out there in the public health system who work day in and day out and that they do not need to engage in a political exercise against an incoming Labor Government—a Government that has put more funding into hospitals such as the Gold Coast Hospital, a Government that is trying to rectify the decades of

neglect that it inherited in 1989 and a Government that started the \$1.5 billion Hospital Building Program which, I might say, started Stage 4 of the Logan Hospital. There are dedicated doctors at the Gold Coast Hospital. They do not need the AMA's leadership.

Time expired.
