



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 17 November 1998

HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (3.26 p.m.): The other day, in respect of what should have been a very non-controversial Bill, the debate turned into an episode of personal abuse from the shadow Minister. That abuse was not personal abuse of the Minister—Ministers expect to have to take that—but the personal abuse was directed at the senior bureaucracy in the Department of Health.

Who are these people? They are people who were appointed by the current Premier when he was the Health Minister. They were people in whom the now Deputy Leader of the National Party, the member for Toowoomba South, had absolute confidence. In other words, they survived the change of Government unscathed and now, lo and behold, the only person they are not acceptable to is the member for Maroochydore. Why are they not acceptable to the member for Maroochydore? The Minister takes advice from them! According to her, that is their big sin.

The shadow Minister made comments such as, "You shouldn't be listening to the bean counters." I thought that was a rather odd thing to say. I heard her go on to speak about the role of the Chief Health Officer, and she went into some detail. I thought that she knew something about the Chief Health Officer. But then I heard the member for Burleigh and the member for Caloundra make pretty well the same speech. But lo and behold it was the member for Callide who gave it away. That joker came straight into Parliament from the Monto Council, yet he knew something about the Chief Health Officer. What did that prove? It proved one thing and one thing only: far from listening to bean counters—something that the shadow Minister said we should not do—she had obviously been given the speech and handed it out to all of the other members who spoke. She got that speech from one person and one person only—the Chief Health Officer. The member should not give us this rubbish about not listening to bureaucrats; she does not listen to anybody other than one bureaucrat.

When the shadow Minister said, "These things operate elsewhere", I challenged her. I said, "Name the one other State that does not have these authorities." All other Australian jurisdictions have a senior medical officer who advises on medical or public health matters, but all have limited or no statutory powers. In Victoria and New South Wales, the equivalent to the Chief Health Officer has no statutory powers. Such powers are vested solely in the chief executive.

When I challenged the Opposition spokesperson to name the State, her only offering was the Australian Capital Territory, but it is not a State. In fact, unlike Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory has only one hospital, and that hospital is smaller than the Princess Alexandra Hospital. In other words, she is trying to use a model of anything other than a State. What sort of a joke is she? She has more front than the Myer Centre in coming in here, attacking the Minister and attacking the senior bureaucracy when she cannot point to one single State that has the same set of circumstances.

It is obvious; it is complete hypocrisy. The shadow Minister's speech was written for her. All the notes were written for her by one person, and that person had a vested interest in making sure that she and Opposition members used exactly the same speech. Why do we know that? Because that is the way bureaucracy works! When there is power to be lost, they will hand around the speech, and she was mug enough to pick it up without looking at it. There was the old stand-by of, "There should have been more consultation." Everybody who is on a losing side uses that excuse—more consultation. What about consultation? It was there in February of this year under the former Health Minister.

Mr Grice: Have you got anything to say about the Bill?

Mr MICKEL: This is about the Bill. The honourable member should go back to sleep.

The other thing was about money. Opposition members said that Health should not be about money; it should be about other things. They would say that, would they not? Because the previous Minister had a Horan health tax which, under Mrs Sheldon's answer to the Parliament last year, was going to rip \$144m out of the recurrent money needed to pay for doctors and nurses in the public hospital system! The other thing they said was, "The hospital system is in crisis because a few beds are being closed down." They went on to cite the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Do they know why the RBH has to close them down? Because under the previous Health Minister there is a \$15m budget overrun!

Mr Grice: What has that got to do with the Bill?

Mr MICKEL: The member opposite asks, "What has that got to do with Health?" Let me tell him. There is an enterprise bargaining system, which the previous Health Minister said would be paid for, that is not paid for and has not been delivered and there is a \$15m overrun. Let me offer the member this statement—

"It makes good management sense, if hospitals are running millions of dollars over budget ... to run them properly so that perhaps the occupancy rate can be not 60% but about 85% or 90%, just like it is in a lot of larger and busy hospitals, and make better use of staff and budget."

Do honourable members know who said that? The previous Health Minister said it in 1997. In other words, it was good enough for him then, but apparently it is a crisis when the current Health Minister has to bring that hospital back into budget because of the absolute and sheer incompetence of the previous Health Minister which is now taken up by the current shadow Health Minister. In other words, they are trying to build this scenario of a crisis in the public hospital system when none exists. The reason for that is that they are trying to stooge for the Federal Government, because it has embarked time and again on diverting money that should be used for the public hospital system into the private health coverage system. It spent \$1.5 billion and it did not make one tap of difference. That money could have been used in the Queensland public hospital system.

The Opposition is silent on that. The reason it is silent on that is the same reason it is silent on the GST and the way Queensland was short-changed the other day. When push comes to shove, the Opposition will never stand up for Queensland and, in this case, it will not stand up for the Queensland public hospital system. If honourable members have any doubt about that at all, they should look at the situation in Maryborough. They were told they needed a certain amount of money and what were they given? Half the amount that was required! How can a hospital system be run when it is getting less than the amount of money that is required?

I wanted to nail—and nail quite convincingly—the rubbish that was being peddled by the Opposition spokesperson and certainly the member for Toowoomba South the other day. I will deal now with other aspects of the Bill.

Mr Grice: The Bill?

Mr MICKEL: I have been dealing with the Bill the whole time. The honourable member's mind has been in neutral while his mouth has been engaged. He is an excellent case for wearing helmets in motor cars.

The Bill mentions, among other things, money for cancer. Next week the member for Kurwongbah will be down in Logan Central doing something absolutely positive—delivering services for the people of Logan City. She will be opening a breast screening clinic. This is a major breakthrough; it is a tremendous service for the people of Logan City. Without that new clinic, as honourable members would know, people from my electorate and the electorate of Woodridge would have to travel vast distances to access such a service.

It is a comprehensive and useful service that the Minister is providing. It will be much appreciated by those women aged over 40. I am going down to the Crestmead Community Centre this Friday to address the over forties to let them know the good things that the Minister is delivering. She is delivering better health services for the people of Logan City.

While I am at it, I want to talk about the child health service clinic and the child health service in Browns Plains. As honourable members know, the Browns Plains area is a growth area; it has a large population and is the centre for a whole lot of growth to the north in the electorate of Archerfield and certainly to the south in the electorate of Beaudesert and, of course, in my wonderful electorate of Logan. That health service needs a couple of things and I am hoping to alert the Minister to them.

One of the things we are about is providing a wider range of parenting programs so that we can get that early intervention to help those mothers down in Logan who may be under stress or in need of some parental support. I am hoping that, just as the Minister has been sympathetic in providing the breast screening clinic for those women aged 40 years and over, she will take on board the need for better programs to help those mothers there to provide better parenting services and to prevent things

such as child abuse and also to help those people who are under stress. I am hoping very much that the Minister will take that on board today—and perhaps the director-general over there can take a few notes as well—and see if we can have a talk with the Logan/Beaudesert health district and see if we can provide much enhanced services for the people of the Logan City area.

It is a pleasure to be able to support this Bill. I commend the Minister for the excellent services that she is providing for the Logan area. I hope that the House will reject—and reject utterly—the fanciful comments made by the member for Maroochydore in her personal abuse of the Minister the other day and certainly her personal abuse of people such as Dr Rob Stable, for whom I have a very high regard and who has done an excellent job.

Miss SIMPSON: I rise to a point of order. The member's accusations are unfair. They are also malicious and untrue, and I ask that they be withdrawn. I at no time cast reflections upon the Director-General of Health. I was referring to the Bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The member has made her point. The member for Logan will withdraw those remarks.

Mr MICKEL: If she finds some offence in that, of course I withdraw. She was referring to Dr Stable. He is the only one who could be the chief bean counter——

Miss SIMPSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. He has not withdrawn those comments. That is offensive and untrue.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! He withdrew the remarks.

Mr MICKEL: I will clarify. I want to protect you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not want to put you in an awkward position. I withdraw. I simply make the point that the shadow Minister is attacking people for being bean counters and for not listening to the bureaucracy. The director-general is the one responsible. If the shadow Minister does not want to own up to her remarks of the other day, then I am very pleased that I have persuaded her that Dr Stable and his officers are excellent officers who do not deserve to be derided by the likes of her. As for her personal attacks on the Minister, she will find it far better——

Miss SIMPSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I have at no time derided the director-general. I have referred to the principal legislation.

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

Miss SIMPSON: That is offensive and untrue and he is continuing to——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Which words in particular did you find offensive and untrue?

Miss SIMPSON: He repeated exactly the same words—that I "derided the director-general". I at no time——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Which words were they?

Miss SIMPSON: He said that I "derided the director-general". I have at no time done that. I ask that his comments be withdrawn. They are offensive and untrue.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Logan will withdraw the words that the shadow Minister "derided the director-general".

Mr MICKEL: I withdraw those words. I have tremendous confidence in Dr Stable and his administrative staff, unlike the Opposition. I think he has done an outstanding job. He did a great job in trying to clear up the mess created by the previous Minister, the honourable member for Toowoomba South. The \$15m overrun at RBH alone is a disgrace. I know that Dr Stable will be working hard with the Minister to help try to get that great hospital back in order so that it can carry on. There is \$52m in unfunded commitments left over from the previous Minister. I know that there is a lot of work to be done there.

In my view, Stage 4 of the Logan Hospital was deliberately slowed down under the administration of the previous Minister. I am hoping that we can get cracking on that. As I have said to the House previously, there will be 400 full-time equivalent jobs there when that stage is finished. It is an important project. I support the Bill and hope that the House will do so as well.
