



Speech by

PHIL REEVES

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

Hansard 16 September 1998

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (6.40 p.m.): In rising to support the amendment, I wish to highlight the new services to be provided to the people of Maryborough. As part of the Labor Government's health initiatives for the people of Maryborough, three child health nurses and two school nurses will be provided. Their appointments are evidence of the Government's commitment to early intervention and prevention in focusing on community health care. Maryborough will also receive a teleradiology service, which will allow X-rays to be taken in Maryborough and read in Brisbane. Other new services will be provided by one paediatric occupational therapist, one paediatric physiotherapist, one behavioural psychologist, two alcohol and drug workers and enhanced palliative care community services.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr REEVES: I am here to stay. Early in the new year, a new 14-bed in-patient mental health unit will be provided and an expansion of community mental health services will include an additional two adult mental health workers and three child and youth mental health workers. Action is currently under way to recruit a psychiatrist. Advertisements for new positions are to be placed in the local media on Saturday, in the Courier-Mail next Thursday and in the Australian on Saturday week. Those advertisements will be for two child and youth psychologists, one child and youth social worker and an adult psychologist.

Commencement of services will be a priority for the district. The new services will be provided on top of an extensive range of services already provided in the Maryborough/Hervey Bay district, including general surgery, limited urology, orthopaedics, intensive care, coronary care, internal medicine, radiology and pathology, pharmacy, accident and emergency, specialist outpatient clinics, ICU and CCU, renal, rehabilitation, chemotherapy, specialist outpatients clinics and general outpatient clinics and outreach clinics including speech pathology, dietetics, social work, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and dental services.

I wish to inform honourable members of the background to some of these issues. One of the priorities of the Government has been to guarantee after-hours services for the people of the Maryborough district. It has been very difficult to have private specialists in Maryborough take up VMO appointments at Hervey Bay. Therefore, it was necessary to recruit a full-time specialist at Hervey Bay. When VMOs or full-time specialists in Maryborough or Hervey Bay take leave or are otherwise absent, there is no locum. There is only partial coverage at one or other site, for example in paediatrics and internal medicine.

This happened in July of this year when the VMO at Maryborough took leave. The district was unable to arrange a locum to cover the situation and partial coverage was arranged from Hervey Bay with a 24-hour telephone backup. The Minister has already advised us that following intensive negotiations with staff and local health professionals, Queensland Health was able to reach an agreement for medicos to provide 24-hour specialist coverage for patients. The issues of clinical standards and the on-call ability of specialists at the two sites of Maryborough and Hervey Bay will be addressed by a review to be carried out by Dr Stephen Ayre, the Deputy Medical Superintendent at the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

I also point out the inherent difficulties in providing coverage to an area such as this. The Fraser Coast District Health Service covers over 7,500 square miles and is some 270 kilometres north of Brisbane. At the 1996 census, the population of the district was 73,640, which comprised 40,500 in the Hervey Bay local government area and a total of 33,140 in the local government areas of Maryborough, Tiaro and Woocoo. The Department of Local Government and Planning forecasts a population increase for Hervey Bay of up to 53% by the year 2006, compared to only 14% for Maryborough, Tiaro and Woocoo. By 2011, the Hervey Bay population is expected to grow by 81%, compared to 21% in Maryborough, Tiaro and Woocoo. By 2011, the population of Hervey Bay is expected to be 73,250. That is approaching double that of Maryborough and surrounding areas, which will be 39,880.

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.45 p.m.): Much of what Government members have said so far is completely irrelevant to the debate. It is not a matter of whether the Health Minister believes that what she is doing in Maryborough is in the best interests of the health of the people of Maryborough. It is not about what the Health Department believes is in the interests of the health of the people of Maryborough. It is not about the Government's good record, as the member for Mansfield has spoken to the Parliament about when he cited the proposals of the Health Department.

This censure motion is about whether, prior to the last election, the Minister and her Government misled the people of Maryborough. It is about analysing the situation prior to the last election and determining whether the Government gave a commitment to maintain what the coalition had promised the people of Maryborough. If the Minister gave that commitment, she deserves to be censured by the motion that has been moved against her in this Parliament. At the end of the day, if the Minister and the Government gave a commitment to honour what the then Government had promised the people of Maryborough and if they have broken that commitment, the House deserves to censure the Minister. If we are not prepared to censure the Minister, we are effectively turning a blind eye to the fact that the Minister and the Government misled the people of Maryborough prior to the election.

To support the view that the Minister and the Government have misled the people of Maryborough, it is quite clear from the Budget papers that were presented in May by the then coalition Government that \$8.3m was allocated for the ongoing redevelopment of the Maryborough Base Hospital and for the completion of the new mental health facility, kitchen, mortuary and so on. Yesterday, in his Budget papers the Treasurer quoted a figure of \$5.4m. Is that an example of the Labor Party honouring the commitment that it gave prior to the last election to maintain spending on the Maryborough Hospital? Quite clearly, it is not. That is what this debate is all about.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr SLACK: The Minister can interject all she likes to try to defend the position that she adopted prior to the election, when she misled the people of Maryborough. If members do not believe that those people were misled, they need only look at all of these press reports. There are not just one or two of them. The member for Maroochydore quoted the Deputy Premier and others who, prior to the election, gave a commitment to the people of Maryborough. By amending the censure motion, the Government is asking the House to condone the actions of the Minister and the Government in relation to a commitment that they gave prior to the election, which is what this debate is all about. It is not about whether the Health Department or the Minister believes that what they proposed was in the best interests of the people of Maryborough; it is about whether a commitment was given and whether that commitment was reneged on. Any other contribution by Government members is completely irrelevant to the debate that is before the House.

Miss Simpson: She should say "sorry".

Mr SLACK: As the shadow Minister said, she should say "sorry". The member for Kurwongbah mentioned the recommendation by a committee of Brisbane specialists that there be only one intensive care unit shared between Bundaberg, Maryborough and Hervey Bay. From statements made by the Health Minister, I understand that she has given her support to that report. I represent the people of Burnett and a Government member represents the people of Bundaberg. In relation to the support units at the Bundaberg Hospital, the comments of the Minister should spell out "danger" in red letters to the people of Bundaberg and the people of Burnett. If the Minister is prepared to follow through on those recommendations, where do Bundaberg and Burnett stand in relation to the commitment of the Health Minister and the Government to health services?

Mrs Edmond: What about the Minister's recommendations?

Mr SLACK: I am not talking about the Minister's recommendations; that is completely irrelevant. We are talking about what this Government proposes to do——

Time expired.
