



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 28 April 1999

### PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.55 p.m.): I move—

"That this House condemns the Beattie Government for the disastrous performance of Ministers, particularly Ministers Edmond, Welford, Spence, Schwarten and Wells."

Let me assure the unnamed Minister who complimented me on my good taste and class by not mentioning him in the motion and let me assure other Ministers that this list is not exhaustive. The Beattie Government as a whole has been shown to be strong on rhetoric and light on substance, and the State of Queensland has paid the price. Never has Queensland known a bigger media junkie than Premier Peter Beattie, who holds press conferences on issues such as recycling his Christmas cards; however, with regard to the really important matters, this Premier has cost this State millions of dollars in job creating developments through his mishandling of the native title issue and his subservience to elements of the union movement.

If the Premier were relying on his ministerial team to deliver the substance he lacks, his strategy has been severely flawed, as we will outline tonight. The disastrous performance of the Labor Health Minister alone has been a severe embarrassment to this Government and is indicative of Peter Beattie's problems. If he were a decisive can-do Premier, he would have culled the dead wood from this team a long time ago. The fact that he has not done so comes at the expense of Queenslanders.

Health is one of the largest portfolio areas and touches on the lives of nearly every Queenslanders. Access to the public hospital system in this State is particularly important, because residents in rural and regional Queensland do not have the choice of services that may be offered in the private health sector. The latest waiting list figures from the hospitals, which I believe were posted on the Internet last night, are timely, because they show clearly that, since the change of Government, Minister Edmond has proved to be more damaging than the millennium bug to the health of Queenslanders. Never has a Government had more money and achieved less.

The Premier claims a 6% surge in admissions to hospitals at a time when the Government has had a 10% increase in Federal funding in this year alone. The increase in hospital admissions is not new. There has been a steady increase for a long time. However, the record increase in Medicare funding last year from the Federal Government was something new. It was a welcome increase of some \$1.3 billion in funding to Queensland. This is a lot of money. But where has the money gone? Certainly, many hospitals around Queensland have not seen this increase, and that is evident in the blow-out in surgery wait times since the change of Government and the significant blow-out in hospital budgets.

The Royal Brisbane Hospital has something like a \$14m budget blow-out; the Prince Charles Hospital, \$1.8m; the Nambour Hospital, over \$2m; Bundaberg, \$1m; Toowoomba, \$7m; and Redcliffe/Caboolture, \$2m. So where has all of the increase in money gone? It certainly has not gone to the hospitals. Let us look at some of the waiting list figures for hospitals around Queensland. As at 1 July 1998—a relevant figure, because these are the last available figures that indicate the coalition's results in reducing surgery waiting times—at Bundaberg some 11.8% of patients were waiting too long on the Category 2, or semi-urgent surgery, list. As at 1 April 1999, under this Government, the figure had blown out to 32.8%. Some 140 people were waiting for longer than the clinically acceptable times

for semi-urgent surgery and more than 50% of people on the orthopaedic surgery waiting list were waiting for longer than was clinically acceptable.

Bundaberg is an interesting story because we know that this Health Minister has presided over a downgrading of other services at the hospital with the closure of the general outpatients clinic. The hospital has experienced something like over a \$1m budget blow-out and, as we have seen from the stress that the staff have been under, that has also been reflected in the resignations from the district health council. There have also been problems, as we know, with security issues at this hospital. Unfortunately, this Minister has failed to resolve the concerns of the staff of this hospital who have unfortunately been afflicted by several incidents recently.

Let us look also at the Gold Coast Hospital. It is a rather interesting one. As we know, because the hospital is in one of the fastest growth rate areas in Australia, it has been under a tremendous amount of pressure. But let us look at the wait times that the Labor Government inherited from the coalition for Category 2 semi-urgent surgery. At 1 July 1998, 18.9% of people waited too long for this type of surgery. Under the Labor Government, as at 1 April 1999 this had blown out to 35.3%. I read these figures because I have heard lie after lie from this Government about what it says it is doing to improve the surgery wait times in hospitals around the State. Yet the figures speak for themselves, that there has been a significant blow-out in wait times for people—vulnerable people—who have been waiting for this surgery and who do not have a lot of other options.

At the Gold Coast Hospital we saw a situation in which thousands of people marched in the street and 21,000 signatures were gathered on a community petition to "help our hospital", yet the Government came up with only a \$10m package over three years, which the local community and health professionals labelled as a bandaid solution—as woefully insufficient. It amounted to an increase of 3.3% annually over the next three years when the Gold Coast population has been increasing at the rate of 5% to 6% a year. It means that the Gold Coast Hospital will be in trouble again in the next year and the following years unless the funding shortfall is addressed seriously and the appropriate level of funds is provided. That is why the coalition has called for an independent investigation into the workload of the Gold Coast Hospital in order to secure an appropriate level of funding.

Let us look at the wait times for Category 2 surgery at Mackay as at 1 July 1998. The figures that the Labor Party inherited from the coalition were no more than 3.2% of people waiting too long for semi-urgent surgery, yet under this Labor Government it has blown out to 13.7%. We see that nearly 50% of orthopaedic patients are waiting too long for their semi-urgent surgery.

Nambour Hospital also is in a similar situation in which the Category 2 surgery wait lists have blown out from 3.2% under the coalition to 13.7% under this Labor Government. At the Princess Alexandra Hospital we see a situation in which the Category 2 surgery wait times have blown out from 20.2% to 28.7%. This is reflected around the State. At the Prince Charles Hospital, the cardiothoracic surgery wait times have blown out. For people waiting for open heart surgery on the semi-urgent lists, more than 42% on the list are waiting longer than is clinically acceptable. That is 161 people on the Category 2 list who are waiting too long, and the story is the same around the State.

But let me tell the story about the honesty of this Government. These are a few of the figures that are on the public record, but what about the other figures that it has covered up? We know that there is more that the Government is hiding in order to try to excuse its appalling mismanagement of one of Queensland's greatest assets—the hospital system. The abuse of the freedom of information rules by this Minister clearly highlights how the Government's claims of greater accountability are a farce.

After I lodged a freedom of information request for information pertaining to the public hospital waiting lists prepared for the Minister or director-general, Health Minister Edmond took some 38 piles of papers in and out the back door of Cabinet. The Minister's actions mean that significant material has been deliberately covered up using the Cabinet loophole, despite her Premier's assurance in the Courier-Mail on 13 July last year that "under his Government documents would only be exempted if they were of a personal nature or deemed to be commercial in confidence". The waiting list figures and also the waiting lists for outpatient services in Queensland are in the public interest, and it is a disgrace that this Minister has hidden them.

Let me also look at the industrial relations record of this Government. Health workers, hotel services and administrative staff at health clinics and hospitals throughout the north stopped work in February to protest about workplace discrimination. Those who took action were all members of the Australian Workers Union. They were demanding the same remote area incentives applicable to other Queensland Health employees. Queensland Health refused to pay staff members wage incentives, despite the high cost of living in remote areas.

Let me also look at the issue of the Mental Health Act. When answering a question on the Mental Health Act during the Estimates committee last year, the Health Minister responded that it had

been in an advanced stage of review since 1993 and she was embarrassed that it had not been completed. Yet here we are in April 1999 and still no action has been taken, still no legislation is before the Parliament. Then let me look at the enterprise bargaining agreement. The Minister is so incompetent that when asked a question she could not tell the Parliament what the cost of the agreement was that she had signed off on. What Minister signs off on an enterprise bargaining agreement or wage increase without knowing how much it costs?

Time expired.