



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 28 October 1999

APPROPRIATION BILL Estimates Committee E Report

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.41 a.m.): This Government is a secretive, Stalinist Government in its approach to managing Queensland Health. When any Government, such as this one, condones using hidden cameras in the roofs of hospitals to spy on staff, it is understandable that this is going to strike fear into the hearts of those staff right around the State. And yet the same measure of that Government is that it is holding back information under freedom of information laws, quite blatantly, by abusing the processes and by taking wheelbarrows of information through Cabinet after I have put in requests for legitimate information. It makes a joke of the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility of the Beattie Labor Government, because where is the transparency, where is the accountability, when basic information which should be available to the people of Queensland and the various health districts is not available on the public record and is taken through Cabinet in the weeks after I have lodged requests under freedom of information?

I want to refer to the assets tax, or the so-called equity return, which this Labor Government has introduced—mortgaging the assets of the Health Department, mortgaging the social infrastructure from here to eternity under this Labor Government. I do not think that people have fully realised the full impact of this, and I just wonder how the Health Minister sat idly by in Cabinet when this tax was applied to every hospital in Queensland. Every future redevelopment or current hospital project or little country hospital will have a 6% tax applied to their assets holdings for assets over the value of \$5,000. In reality, that is going to be an operational tax, because those who cannot flog off the hospital morgue or the hospital precinct will have pressure put on them to come up with the money to fund that tax back to Treasury—a 6% tax.

I cannot understand how a Labor Government can put a tax on infrastructure where obviously there are no commercial returns to be made. That is going to have a major impact, particularly in rural areas, where the fat cat bureaucrats who have increased their salaries in the Health Department are going to be putting pressure on those country hospitals. If they do not have a certain turnover of staff and procedures, they will say, "Why do we need them?" We know why we need them: because they provide a basic level of coverage and care.

With regard to the accrual accounting process, once again we found that, in these Budget papers, there was a disgraceful lack of any targets or measurements of real activity and outcomes. Continually in the process, we found that the Government would use the excuse, "We have gone to accrual accounting." The Health Department would have a very good idea of the transitional arrangements that are in place; it was just that the Minister did not want to bring that accountability into the Chamber and let people know what the impact was upon the district budgets and upon the various services throughout the State.

After the introduction of this Budget into the Parliament, I have had wardsmen, nurses and health professional staff around the State saying to me, "We are having our hours cut back. We are being laid off. We have wards being closed. There is no real increase in our Budgets." Despite what the Minister has put out in her press releases, she has not released any evidence which provides proof of a real increase in funding to many of the districts throughout this State. There is no evidence of a full

funding of the enterprise bargaining agreement which increased the Health wage costs by \$135m in a recurrent year—an extraordinary increase in costs. We cannot see where that has been fully funded to the districts. And certainly, from talking to people who are having their hours cut back, it appears that there is no evidence, and the Minister provided no evidence during the Budget process.

I want to refer to the Radiation Safety Act. It is very important that this be brought to the attention of the people of Queensland. It was listed as an important outcome of the previous financial year, yet it has not all been proclaimed. Extraordinarily, we have seen a reduction, under this Government, in the actual number of audits done on sites containing hazardous radiation material and the monitoring of how those sites are handling that material. New legislation was introduced which was supposed to make it safer for the people of Queensland in relation to radioactive material. But the Government did not fund enough people to go out and monitor those sites. It is completely crazy for a Government to say that it is introducing legislation to make it safer, and then reduce the monitoring of sites and the number of audits of sites that are handling that extremely hazardous material. I question the actions of a Minister who does not provide adequate funding to a very, very important area dealing with some of the most hazardous material that hospitals and a variety of other sites could have on their premises.

Time expired.
