



Speech by

**Mr M. VEIVERS**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

Hansard 14 April 1999

### **GOLD COAST HOSPITAL**

**Mr VEIVERS** (Southport—NPA) (11 p.m.): Recently, it came as somewhat of a shock to see a crowd of more than 2,000 people take to the streets of the Gold Coast. After all, protest marches are not a regular occurrence on the holiday strip. As well, a subsequent petition attracted the greatest number of signatures to any petition ever on the coast. What were these people protesting about? They were protesting about the state of health services or, should I say, the lack of health services at the Gold Coast Hospital, and they are still doing so.

The leaders of the march and the instigators of the petition, Dr Darrell Price and Dr Linda Radford, came under severe criticism as a result of their involvement. The Premier was reported as saying that Dr Price and other senior medical officers at the hospital were putting party politics ahead of patients. I can tell the Premier that I know these doctors and I can tell him that they are the most apolitical people imaginable. However, I know that there are plenty of others, including those on the side of the political fence of those opposite, who continue to use the hospital as a political football. The doctors whom I have mentioned really care about the health of their patients. They gave us, the coalition, just as big a serve when we were in power as they are now giving Labor.

There is one thing that I agree with, and that is that it is high time we took politics out of health. I believe that we can do this if we put our collective minds to it. Every week, there are heartbreaking calls to my office from people saying that they have been denied access to medical services at the Gold Coast Hospital which, I might remind members, is in the heart of my electorate. Most of those people are on the elective surgery waiting list and are suffering afflictions which, although they are not immediately life threatening, are nevertheless debilitating and restrict the quality of life of those who are suffering from them. These people, many of whom are in the twilight of their years, do not deserve this treatment. They have made a contribution to this society during their lifetimes, and they deserve to be looked after.

I do not have to tell members that this problem is not restricted to the Gold Coast Hospital; it is endemic throughout Queensland. I wonder how these people must feel when they hear the sort of debate that we had recently in this House about health issues. It really must give them a feeling of confidence about their parliamentary representatives! I don't think so. Only recently I have gone on the public record as saying that both sides of politics in this State must share some of the blame for the inadequacies in our health system in general and the Gold Coast Hospital in particular. I make no apology for that.

Of course, as the longstanding member for the electorate of Southport, on many occasions I have copped flak about funding for this hospital. Let me point out that I am only one individual among my peers and when Cabinet documents of my era as a member of the coalition Government are eventually released, people will see just how hard I had been fighting in the best interests of the Gold Coast Hospital.

In the meantime, political opportunism continues to flourish. Would-be political aspirants are jostling for positions on the hospital bandwagon. The recent ploy of a known member of the Labor Party to bypass the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, to take a position directly to the Premier was one of the greatest bits of grandstanding that I have seen in all of my years in politics. It was also an insult to the Minister by members of her own party. It is nice to know that the Minister has friends! If this sort

of political and inner-political point scoring is the best that we can do, what hope is there for our health system?

I want to see a totally bipartisan approach to health issues. I want to see politics taken right out of health so that at long last we can have better health care for the community. I suggest that we in this House establish a joint parliamentary standing committee on health—a completely bipartisan body. Nothing else seems to be working. After all, we have a PCJC looking after the CJC; why not have a committee looking after health? So far, everything that has been done has been nothing more than bandaid solutions. I believe it is time that we tried to take some real action. There is no doubt that the establishment of such a standing committee will have the support of my colleagues on this side. I look for similar support from those on the Government benches if they are at all serious about improving health facilities in this State and particularly at the Gold Coast Hospital.

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