



Speech by

Hon. WENDY EDMOND

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard 28 April 1999

PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha— ALP) (Minister for Health) (6.10 p.m.): The member for Maroochydore is intent on highlighting the achievements of the Beattie Labor Government in the Health portfolio, and I thank her for that. I will start with this Government's record \$3.772 billion State Health budget. This Government allocated \$128.8m, or 3.6%, more than the coalition was going to spend in its May Budget and \$288m, or 8.4%, more than the coalition allocated in its previous Budget. That is a heck of a lot more than the increase in Commonwealth funding we got, for whatever year we look at. Every district received an increase in the amount of funding they received.

Record dollars do not mean anything if we do not improve and enhance health services for the people of Queensland. It is worth noting that hospitals received an increase in their recurrent funding of \$63m under our Budget, compared with the \$2m allocated by the coalition across all of Queensland for recurrent hospital budgets. And those opposite dare to stand there and say anything!

This Government committed \$93.8m to new initiatives. In Opposition the Labor Party looked at health needs in our community—the gaps in the services and emerging problems—and in Government we responded. The Beattie Labor Government responded with an extra \$79.9m, or 85%, more than the coalition Government allocated to meet these needs. We did not just whinge negatively, as those opposite do; we came forward with positive policy directions.

It gives me great pleasure to restate the Beattie Labor Government's initiatives and achievements in Health. Just this morning I informed the House how this Government is meeting its election commitments in palliative care. We are providing 10 times what the coalition Government promised to help this long neglected and cash starved area—\$5.1m in the full year. This will mean more palliative care services in hospices and in the home, and respite for carers, instead of, as we saw under the coalition, dying patients on waiting lists for palliative care—waiting lists to be allowed to die with dignity. Do honourable members remember that disgrace under the coalition Government? I do. I raised that in this House when those opposite were cutting funding to palliative care.

This Government is focusing attention on the preventive side of health care, too, particularly in child and adolescent health. I make no apology for that. One child health worker told me that she thought this was the golden age of child health in Queensland. They are now doing all of the things they wanted to do to protect children and keep children well but did not have the resources for. Those opposite should be grateful, because it is happening and is supported on the Sunshine Coast, even if it is not supported by the member for Maroochydore. They are able to do all of the things they wanted to do, and they are simply ecstatic.

Our school nurse program is a highlight. Specially trained nurses will work with our young people in high schools to help them deal with the issues they face—drug and alcohol abuse, body image, sexuality, and suicide awareness and prevention—and the Government is actively supporting Queensland parents with our free parenting support program, which will help them cope with the challenges of parenthood. This program has been internationally praised. The sole voice of objection to spending this money is the member for Maroochydore, even though her electorate was selected as one of the first 15 locations for this program. Later this week I will announce even more enhancements to that program. This Government is about tackling health and social issues before they take root and

destroy Queensland's families. Honourable members would think that coalition members would support that, instead of constantly negatively whingeing.

In the mental health area we have allocated a further \$29m to in-patient community-based services. An extra 200 staff are being employed to improve services and care for mentally ill Queenslanders, particularly in those neglected areas of Bundaberg, Roma, Emerald and Charters Towers that were so long underresourced. I plan to introduce a mental health Bill into the Parliament this year. This is just one of many pieces of legislation that stalled under the previous Minister. I found them all in the too-hard basket, the biggest piece of furniture in my office, which I threw out, along with the drinks cupboard.

Under Labor, the rebuilding of our hospitals and health services is back on track. This year we will be spending more than \$600m—not underspending by more than \$100m, as happened last year—creating 9,000 jobs. Honourable members should compare this with the coalition's dismal effort. Talk about the ice age! The freeze on capital works put our major projects months behind, blowing out the costs and slowing employment. In 1997-98 the coalition did not spend; it underspent by nearly \$100m.

Time expired.
