



Speech by

Hon. WENDY EDMOND

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard 24 August 1999

QUEENSLAND HEALTH

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha— ALP) (Minister for Health) (6.14 p.m.): I move—

"Delete all words after 'Parliament' and insert—

'commends the Beattie Labor Government's actions in getting the health building program back on track, creating jobs, and improving health services; acknowledges its commitment to improving State Government nursing homes; and notes the Government's ongoing commitment to maintaining and strengthening the State's free public hospital system.'."

This Government recognises the need to develop a strategic vision for health systems in Queensland. Queensland Health spends close to \$4 billion a year of taxpayers' money and employs more than 63,000 people. This year will see yet another record increase in the Health budget. Last year, those opposite, who are now bleating, said nothing about the coalition's budget which increased hospital funding by \$2m across the entire State. Those opposite run around the State saying, "Give this one, give that one, give everybody an extra \$2m, \$3m, \$4m or \$5m." In Government the coalition said that increasing hospital funding by \$2m across the State was enough. What a paltry effort! Those opposite did not say a word. The member for Burnett, the member for Maroochydore and the member for Southport sat there while the member for Toowoomba South did that.

Under this Government, I am proud that the public health system is treating more patients and doing record amounts of elective surgery—about 80 patients more per week than under the coalition. We have cut waiting times. I am proud that we have the capital works program back on track and not frozen, not being lost and not being underspent as it was previously. I am proud of the vast range of extra services such as palliative care, school nurses and triple-P programs that we have implemented.

The Health Strategy Advisory Project was developed to help identify current and future needs of the Queensland health system. Its terms of reference reflected the concerns raised by every single State leader in ongoing discussions with the Commonwealth Government about health, and also every State Health Minister of all political persuasions.

Yes, the Health Strategy Advisory Project came up with a number of recommendations. That is what it was meant to do. That was its purpose. Some of these recommendations have been implemented, some were already under way—and the report confirmed their necessity—and some of the recommendations were rejected out of hand. That is what happens with a lot of different reports and recommendations. The consultants did go beyond the scope of the terms of reference in examining issues and making recommendations that were obviously contrary to Government policy. In fact, they acknowledged this themselves, noting in their report that not all of their recommendations would be easily adopted by Government.

As I said this morning, every Government is entitled to seek advice and opinions from a wide range of sources. That does not mean that Governments have to accept every bit of advice they are given. Some more positive recommendations, such as enhancing mental health services and the appointment of zonal managers, were already in train. These are things that I constantly flagged in Opposition. I said that there was a need to have more decisions made in the regions and the districts. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, would understand the need for that in north Queensland.

Other, more radical recommendations are clearly not supported. Queensland will not follow the disastrous entree into privatisation made by the Tory Governments of South Australia, Victoria and

Western Australia. I remind members that it was the same Tory Governments that entered into disastrous privatisation arrangements which were slammed by the Auditors-General in New South Wales and Western Australia. It is the same Tory Governments that are now bleating loudest about budget blowouts. Clearly, privatisation has not solved a thing for those Governments.

This Government is determined to get the right mix of services and facilities. It is committed to providing services where people live, and creating jobs such as those which were created in Logan last week. We saw 40 jobs going into Logan Hospital.

That was the basis of the Health building program that was started by Labor in 1992. It was a vision that Labor needed to implement after 32 years of neglect of Queensland health services. As somebody who worked in those health services during that time—boy, were they neglected for those 32 years while those opposite sat in here and stupefied.

Finally, let us not pretend that it is possible in Health for everyone to have every service just around the corner. No society can deliver that. This Labor Government is committed to ensuring that as many people as possible have access to as many services as possible, wherever they live and whatever their economic circumstances. That is the difference between a Labor Government and a Tory Government.

Time expired.
