



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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POLICE SERVICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES, FUNDING

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (6.32 p.m.): I move—

That this House notes how policing and emergency services are deteriorating due to the lack of government funding and failure to understand the issues facing these personnel on a daily basis.

I have moved this motion tonight because members on our side of the House are concerned by statements and comments in the last couple of weeks by police and fire and ambulance officers about their lack of support from the government and about how that lack of support is compromising the job that they do on behalf of the people of Queensland. There is no doubt in my mind that when we strip away the glossy press releases, the ministerial statements and the media stunts to look at the hard data that underlies this government's performance, we see a government that specialises in not addressing the real issues or bringing a quality professional level of service to the people of Queensland.

That was no more clearly highlighted yesterday in terms of capital works when I brought to the attention of the House that over the past two years capital works for the northern region of Queensland were reduced by some \$140 million. When we consider the areas where that has had an impact, we see that it is right across every service delivery area. It does not matter whether it is education, health, police, fire or ambulance. That is having an enormous effect in this part of the state.

As a specific example, let me outline this particular issue. Two years ago the Northern Region Assistant Commissioner for Police, Mr Graham Williams, made a budget submission to the Beattie government where he listed the region's number one priority as being a replacement station for the Stuart police station. This was because the station needed to be a 24-hour station and because the existing station was overcrowded, unable to hold more than the current staff, which I understand is nine, and failed to meet significant work place health and safety criteria. That was two years ago.

Of course, in those two years the capital works program was reduced such that this government could not even find \$3 million to provide that replacement police station. There is no mention of this station in this year's budget, despite it being put forward as a number one priority for the police. That is a glowing example of how the reduction in capital works can actually impact upon these critical areas of service delivery. When we look at how that translates in terms of officers' ability to do their job and how they respond in terms of time frames and their morale, we see that it has an impact.

Let us turn to the crime statistics in this area. This was another issue I raised in the House yesterday. In this region, we have seen since 1998 when the Premier took office that break and enter offences have increased by 428 annually. Motor vehicle thefts were up by a considerable amount as well. In answer to a question yesterday, the Premier provided some further information to which I will refer.

In 1998, 4,579 break and enters were recorded in this area. Yesterday, the Premier said that his latest information indicated there had been a decline in the break and enter rate. The Premier was right. In July 2001 there were 5,007 break and enters. In July this year it has decreased to 4,980. It fell by 27 incidents over that 12-month period. But the underlying number is almost 5,000. What was it when the Premier took office? About 4,500! So there was a significant increase in that period, but in the last 12 months there was a decrease of 27.

With regard to motor vehicle thefts, it is much the same story. Again, when the Premier took office the numbers were 707 motor vehicle thefts for this area. In 2001, it was 886—a huge jump, representing about a 25 per cent increase. Again, the Premier said there had been a decrease—and I acknowledge there is a decrease—in 2002, down to 802. But that is still over the 1998 figure—a 13.5 per cent increase in motor vehicle thefts in this part of the state. That is still far too many for a government that came in on a promise of breaking the crime cycle.

Members will remember that the Premier said he would take charge of this crime reduction task force in the Premier's Department. Judging by the results, it certainly has not delivered. Why would the police not be disappointed at the government's response to their call for additional resources when they see these sorts of things happening? They see their overtime budgets slashed. They cannot take additional overtime, and that has an impact on the amount of policing that can occur in our community. Instead of providing an around-the-clock service, we are seeing, because of the overtime restrictions, police being forced to cut back on their service delivery.

What do the police see in Queensland? They see a government which can spend an extra \$15 million in terms of a cost overrun on the Goodwill Bridge in Brisbane but which cannot find the money for additional overtime for police.

Of course, in the industrial relations campaign we see the government advertising in the *Sunday Mail* and the *Courier-Mail*. People in this part of the state would like to see this money go into extra overtime to assist our police tackle the crime statistics in this area. As I said before, critical areas include not just police but also the ambulance service.

Look at what has happened up here in terms of the ambulance service. In December 2000 the Beattie government boasted that 74.7 per cent of code 1 emergency calls in Townsville, the northern region, were responded to within the national benchmark of 10 minutes; but by March 2002 the number of code 1 calls in north Queensland being responded to within that 10 minute time frame had plummeted to just 68 per cent—amongst the north's worst ever levels. It is not just the north that is suffering worse response times. At the beginning of 2001, 71 per cent of all code 1 calls right across Queensland were responded to in the recommended less than 10 minutes. But when the data was updated and presented to state parliament in April this year, that figure had plummeted to just 66.8 per cent—again a substantial fall. These are the criteria on which we should base the government's record in terms of its ability to fund and get a proper ambulance service in Queensland.

We should not be looking at the glossy press releases or the media stunts launching new ambulance vehicles, we should be looking at the hard data—the response times, the service people get, how long they have to wait for an ambulance to turn up to their door if they are sick or if there is an accident on the road. Those are the critical issues. These are the types of things that save people's lives. It is not the launch of an ambulance vehicle, it is the response time. Ambulance men in ambulance vehicles is the important thing. We have seen a deterioration in the response times right across-the-board not only in north Queensland but right across the state.

Let us talk about morale. How does this affect morale? We see in the annual budget presented in the MPS statements a measure of staff morale. Last year the state government set itself a target of achieving a 75 per cent satisfaction rating amongst its employees for access to and quality of training programs. Did they get their 75 per cent satisfaction rating? Look at the documents. The satisfaction rating is just 58 per cent—the lowest of any government department. It is shamefully low. In other words, almost half of their respondents—their employees—were dissatisfied with the access to and quality of training programs being delivered by this government. This is supposed to be the Smart State. We cannot have a Smart State when employee morale is abysmally low, which is quite clearly shown in the documents. That is why we have moved this motion. When we strip away the veneer, when we go to the hard data, when we look at the crime rates, when we look at what is happening in terms of the Capital Works Program, when we look at the morale of the staff in the essential services area, we get a completely different picture from the one that the government is trying to paint.

One of the worst serviced areas in the state is north Queensland. Against almost all of the key criteria we find that this part is lower than the state average. That is why we put this motion on the agenda. The government really needs to look at the hard criteria, stop believing its own press releases and start putting some money into these essential services, because that is what Queenslanders want. They do not want the glitz, glamour, press releases, ministerial statements and TV grabs at night-time, they want the essential services delivered so that the people in this state can have confidence that, if there is an accident or a crime, there will be qualified professionals on the job to give them the help they desperately need. I have covered two areas—police and ambulance. Other speakers will cover the Fire and Rescue Service and other speakers will no doubt rebut the government's amendment to the motion.

Time expired.