



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES D

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (5.11 p.m.) This was the first Estimates Committee hearing that I have been able to be involved in, and the experience was interesting. After going through the process I now realise how many questions there are and how little time there is to ask them. I suggest that to waste any of that time is a sin. I can assure the ministers that I will not allow any of my allotted time to be utilised in less than an adequate fashion in future Estimates Committees in which I may take part. I would like to thank the minister for finally clarifying the position of Farrhome's future; that is, that Farrhome will in time close and the beds will be removed to Wondai and possibly Nanango.

Although the minister has stated that Kingaroy has sufficient aged care beds to cater for Kingaroy's needs and for those with sufficient funds or assets to be able to stay in their home town in close proximity to their families, the loss of the public aged care beds is of no concern. But there are many people who do not have the resources and who rely heavily on the public aged care system. These people are to be virtually evicted from their home town because they are not affluent. This is discrimination against the poorer members of our communities. I ask whether the minister believes this is fair. I do not and I do not believe those incapable of paying for private aged care would think it fair, either. With Kingaroy's potential growth as a regional centre, I sincerely ask the minister to place on the public record how her government views the future prospects of Kingaroy receiving a replacement public aged care facility. This facility is needed to meet the poorer families' needs to place their loved family member in a facility in Kingaroy.

One thing all ministers must realise is that the added distance of having to travel to nearby towns to see loved ones can be not only a great impost on those with limited incomes but may also make it impossible for visits as many poorer persons in our communities walk everywhere and the lack of public transport makes regular visits virtually impossible. To send many of these elderly people out of town to such facilities, to virtually send them into exile at a time in life when they need their family most, is a form of discrimination. I was made aware today that all state politicians were given a 3.3 per cent wage increase, a flow-on from the federal pay rise. When I see or hear of people on the enormously long waiting lists who want to be able to breathe easily or of people suffering from any form of physical discomfort waiting to have a condition attended to, I am embarrassed to try and justify an increase in my own wage; in fact, I cannot. There are too many people suffering from mental health or other disabilities who cannot access the simplest of services.

During the nurses' strike the minister was happy to talk about the nurses' large pay packets, but the minister did not make it clear to Queenslanders that to get such a wage the nurses are working back-to-back shifts and overtime. Nurses are doing this because there is a shortage of nurses. I acknowledge the minister does admit to that shortage, but it does not make my pay increase sit very comfortably with me.

When we can reduce waiting lists to a reasonable time—and I do not believe three to four years is acceptable or reasonable and definitely not something to be proud of—when we get the equipment and staff numbers up to scratch in our hospitals, when the literacy levels in our schools are higher and when we resolve all the issues, I will be content to accept any rise. I do not believe anyone would

begrudge us one. Then I will be content to look favourably on infrastructure such as Lang Park—only then—and when we have addressed the essentials of our public service responsibilities.

In my electorate I have been informed that WorkCover verbally informed the family of a severely disabled girl that it would renovate that family's house up to the cost of \$50,000 to make the family capable of caring for her properly. On discovering that this young woman, who was only 19 at the time of her accident, did not in fact own the home—and I ask how many 19-year-olds do own their own home—and that the parents who are the 24-hour care givers own the home, WorkCover allegedly told the mother that it would not pay more than \$2,000. Although this is a matter for minister Nuttall—and I will be talking with him at a later date—it is relevant in that this girl must be returned to hospital every night. Where is the economics in this situation? An amount of \$50,000 would ensure that the young lady could be cared for full-time in her own home as opposed to the cost of hospital accommodation and daily care. It does not take many days in hospital to chew up \$50,000 when talking about a young woman's lifetime care. There must be times when all ministerial portfolios must come together to maximise the dollars to gain maximum benefit. Many people outside these walls would feel that there is a lot of waste in the form of duplication in many areas. One thing that I have noticed—and it is one that has been brought to my attention more than once—is that as soon as the word 'disability' is applied to a piece of equipment its price tag seems to soar two or three times. As this is the only Estimates I will be addressing tonight I take the time—

Time expired.