



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 31 July 2002

### APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES C

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.45 p.m.): I rise to speak to the estimates committee report, particularly in relation to industrial relations. Recently Queensland has seen some of the worst industrial disputes in the health sector in its history. This in the year of 10 years of Labor rule in Queensland. I feel there has been somewhat of a hospital pass by the Health Minister on this issue. The Health Minister has gladly taken a back seat to the Industrial Relations Minister with regard to negotiations with the health sector and with the public health unions. There has been growing discontent with the way the public health system has been managed. Now the Industrial Relations Minister is the focus of a range of enterprise bargaining negotiations across other portfolio areas. He is the focus of across-government mismanagement of portfolios.

When the Health Minister was asked about the meltdown with industrial relations, the strike action and cancelled surgery, she deferred to the Industrial Relations Minister. When the Industrial Relations Minister was asked about aspects of the Health Department situation and the strikes, he passed the buck back to the Health Minister. This is typical of the lack of leadership and responsibility in dealing appropriately with work force issues, with valid concerns about staffing ratios and with outrage from public sector workers, particularly those on the front line of health care. There seems to be no leadership by this government and no reasonable provision made for an appropriate offer to health workers.

It is interesting that in New South Wales Premier Carr averted strike action by some of his nurses by saying that he would accept the outcome of the Industrial Relations Commissioner in that state. Yet in this state there has been an absolute blind stubbornness to avoid arbitration up to this point. I think it is because this state government knows that it has mismanaged the books and did not want to go before an independent arbitrator who would make a decision which could be more favourable to health workers.

There was a minimal increase in staffing numbers in the previous budget—something like 0.3 per cent in the acute area of hospitals. In this budget the increase barely rises above that 0.3 per cent. This is the frustration that is flowing through strongly in the industrial actions being taken by health workers. I see from today's paper that another sector of the health work force was to meet with the Industrial Relations Minister about its grievances with the way its claims have been handled. Radiation therapists were striking from their jobs in south-east Queensland public health facilities, meaning that cancer patients would not receive radiation therapy today unless their cases were emergencies.

This is a result of the total mismanagement of this government. Yet the only real change that has happened should not be blamed on enterprise bargaining; it is the way in which this government has mismanaged the budget. It has centralised its industrial relations process by putting a greater responsibility on the Industrial Relations Minister. Unfortunately, because of the lack of depth and calibre of the front bench of the Beattie Labor government and the total mismanagement of the budget the workers are no better off. We have seen a real meltdown. There is worse to come. We certainly know that a range of other workplace issues in the health sector have not yet hit the deck. Unfortunately, it is the people of Queensland—it is the patients and it is the dedicated health workers who want to work in that system—who are the ones who are paying the price.

Time expired.