



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES D

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.01 p.m.): I rise to speak on the report of Estimates Committee D, particularly in relation to Health. Yet again, when questions were put to the Minister for Health during the estimates process, we saw a total unwillingness to answer basic questions and to be accountable to the parliament. The Health Minister repeatedly refused to provide details about the cancelled surgery rates in Queensland Health facilities over the last 12 months. Some patients have had category 1 surgery cancelled. Those patients deserve to have their voices heard and they deserve to have answers from the Health Minister, who will not be accountable to the parliament.

The Health Minister was also unwilling to answer questions in relation to the industrial relations meltdown in the Queensland Health system. Once again, she wanted to play second fiddle, to drift into the background and to pass responsibility on to other ministers. When asked about aspects such as the funds set aside for enterprise bargaining, the minister was unwilling to provide an answer. Under questioning, the Health Minister stated that the enterprise bargaining agreement negotiated under the coalition government required \$30 million in savings to be found. It appears that the Health Minister has confused the enterprise bargaining agreements.

The Queensland Regional Health Authority Certified Agreement 1994 and the Queensland Department of Health Central Office Certified Agreement 1995, struck under the Goss Labor government, were to achieve \$38 million in savings through productivity gains in order to fund the final four per cent pay increase. We now have a situation in which the lack of real funded increases for staff is really hitting home. Last year's inadequate allocation of funds for staff increases meant that there was only a 0.3 per cent budgeted increase for workers in the acute inpatient area of hospitals. This year, a similar amount has been budgeted. Is it any wonder there is such ferocity in the industrial relations meltdown and that hard-working and dedicated staff—nurses, doctors, allied health and other support staff—have said that enough is enough? They want answers from this Health Minister and they find that she does not want to be accountable.

The same goes for public liability insurance. I asked the Health Minister about situations in which public health indemnity insurance does not provide the full indemnity required to give certainty to health professionals practising in the health system. It may be that Labor members with less experience have not talked to their constituents about the problem of cancelled surgery resulting from health professionals withdrawing their services from public hospitals throughout Queensland. It is clear that those Labor members do not want to listen to their constituents, and neither does the Health Minister. When they are asked questions about fixing this problem and the discretionary cover, which is subject to government policy and can change from time to time, they do not want to listen and they do not want to know.

Our children are being failed by the oral health aspect of the budget. The fact that the target by which to address this and other areas of dental care has been lowered demonstrates a total failure by the government.

I turn now to the area of mental health and another example and reminder for Labor members who seem to blindly support this Health Minister, who is failing the health system in Queensland. The state proponent of the budget shows a 40 per cent fall in the actual state contribution to mental health funding over the last 12 months. I asked the Health Minister to explain this, but she did not. She was

given the opportunity to explain it. There were no footnotes documented on this particular aspect. I note that she had the opportunity and the full backup staff to call on at the appropriate time to answer that question, and she did not do it. This is a case in point. When the figures are actually put before the minister in good faith and she is asked for a reply, we do not get those answers. She is more intent on staying blind to the problems in the health system and entering into personal abuse than listening to the real concerns of people when the opportunity is available in an appropriate forum.

There are a range of other health issues. I have had distressed, urgent category 1 patients coming to me because they cannot have their surgery in a timely way, or they have been prepped for surgery and were ready to go and then had it cancelled. I will not stay silent and I will demand accountability from a Health Minister who has been absent from her responsibilities and who refuses to answer questions and then, when she does, often does not rely upon accurate facts.

One of the criticisms the opposition has made of the estimates process over the years is that there is an unwillingness to call forward senior public servants to answer questions when the minister does not know the answer. It is time we had a system similar to the Senate system, where there is an appropriate way to—

Time expired.