



Speech by

**Miss FIONA SIMPSON**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

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Hansard 21 August 2002

**PUBLIC SECTOR, ENTERPRISE BARGAINING**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): It is amazing that we have heard the government claim that there is no crisis in the way that it has handled the industrial situation in Queensland, yet it is willing to wheel out of retirement the silver budge—Bob Hawke—and bring him to Queensland in order to fix up its mess.

**Mr Horan:** Gordon can't do it.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Gordon cannot do it. Even union leaders in this state such as Bill Ludwig are saying that this is the worst industrial situation they have seen in 100 years of history, yet the Beattie Labor government is so arrogant that it cannot listen to peak leaders from the unions. It is not listening to the workers and it is certainly not listening to ordinary Queenslanders who are fed up with how it has managed the situation. No matter how much money one gives a Labor government, it is always going to mismanage it. There has been something like a \$1.3 billion operating loss under the Beattie government, yet somehow the Premier can find \$70 million for the government's advertising campaign. While some of those costs may be legitimate, every time the people of Queensland see the face of the Premier and his ministers in those advertisements, the glossy brochures and the expensive advertising campaigns they should think of the hospitals, the nurses, the doctors and the patients who are waiting to get access to services.

Tonight the Health Minister claimed that there is such a wonderful situation in our hospitals and that there are low vacancies. If a person listened to her they would believe that it was a utopia, yet there are more than 60 vacancies in Mount Isa. This is where the crux of the industrial dispute has come to such a ferocious head. People are saying that it is not just about money; it is about the working conditions that the minister denies are still a problem. But the human faces of this are the patients who are finding that they are talking to staff who are stressed because there is a lack of people in the front line. A few minutes ago I spoke again to the family of an 86-year-old woman who has once again had her colonoscopy cancelled but who has now had to be admitted because of a blockage. This is a repeated story and a frustration being expressed by health workers on the front line. They are saying, 'Let us do the job but give us the resources to do it.'

In the previous budget there was a 0.3 per cent increase in staff numbers in the acute in-patient section of hospitals, but when one looks at where Premier Beattie has been spending the money and where the increases in staff have been it is in the Community Engagement Division and the publicity regime of this government. Is it any wonder that people are inflamed and angry? He says how dare people try to get better working conditions in these critical areas of care yet then threatens to cut 2,000 jobs from the Public Service in Queensland. When asked about this, the Health Minister simply said, 'Oh, well, Queensland Health has to give up its fair share of those jobs as well.' That is simply not good enough, because we know that in acute patient care there simply has not been a fair increase and we know that the support services that are necessary in our hospitals and our ancillary health services will suffer as a result.

In relation to arbitration with the Nurses Union, we were calling for this to go to arbitration for weeks. Meanwhile, there was a dragging, lingering, painful situation where the government allowed hospital beds to be closed, surgery to be cancelled and seemed to be happy that it was saving money at the expense of patients who were having their surgery cancelled. Finally, it was dragged kicking and screaming into the independent commission for arbitration. It should have gone there a lot quicker than that. In fact, New South Wales took its situation to the independent commission sooner because it recognised that it needed to ensure that these critical areas of service were dealt with in a fair way. Why did it take this government so long?

Premier Beattie has inflamed the situation. I note that some of his dud ministers have come out of hiding tonight in order to defend their track record. But people who have been working on the front line are saying that it is not good enough, the government is not listening, it is arrogant, and it is not putting services where they are needed; and now it is threatening people with 2,000 jobs that will be cut. People simply do not feel safe. It does not matter how much money we give a Labor government, it will always mismanage it. It is interesting that the government's union mates are saying, 'You're not sticking up for the workers. You've let Queenslanders down. You've let the workers down.' The government is letting down key services such as the public health system. It is a sorrowful day when literally hundreds and thousands of workers have been striking and marching because of this government's inaction.

Time expired.