



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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HEALTH CRISIS

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.01 p.m.): Welcome, Health Minister Wendy Edmond—the best Health Minister Queensland has seen in 50 years, according to Premier Peter Beattie. Yet today we see him bailing her out again after she made statements that could have come from 'Dr Death' himself, Philip Nitschke. Who knew the Queensland Health Minister was a euthanasia advocate by stealth and that people in renal services were stamped with a use-by date. Here we have Mr Beattie cleaning up the remnants of the chunder bucket yet again. Mrs Edmond opens her mouth and the Premier is forced to close it. I note that Mr Beattie has taken the opposite line to the 'Minister for Death'. He says—

Governments should do whatever is within their power to provide medical infrastructure to treat the sick, even if it involves high costs.

Whereas Mrs Edmond says quality of life should dictate future allocation of health resources and death may be a better outcome for some patients. Does she advocate capital punishment as well? When I accused Mrs Edmond of blaming God for claiming it was 'not a perfect world' when a man died waiting for treatment for a heart condition, I did not realise that Mrs Edmond thought she had the divine right to choose who lives and dies. She gives the kiss of death instead of the kiss of life. Mrs Edmond accuses Queensland people of being out of touch with reality, yet she is the one refusing to acknowledge that there is a health crisis. Instead she is trying to create an escape route by claiming that some people are better off dead.

I note Mr Beattie saying today that his government will 'do all it can to expand and provide health services and care for the whole community'. Just how far does the Queensland community expand in Mr Beattie's view? North Queensland is obviously getting the short shrift from this government. The broken hip of an 89-year-old New Zealand woman went undetected at Cairns Base Hospital, and a 72-year-old Cairns man has been waiting 12 months to have his prostate gland removed. Townsville Hospital is no better, with a 63-year-old Cairns man desperately needing spinal surgery being told upon arrival that there were no free beds. There are numerous examples, but maybe Mrs Edmond does not think these people have a good enough life to live either.

Dozens of beds are also being closed at QEII Hospital, which the minister says is because of vacant medical specialist positions. This is grossly untrue. The reason these beds have to be closed is that the hospital budget does not provide for them. The truth is that health in Queensland is severely underfunded by a state government with other priorities. Despite Mr Beattie's belated claims today, health is obviously not a priority for his government, which is not so smart. How smart is it to ration lives? How smart is it to cripple resources in hospitals to a degree where staff cannot be expected to fulfil their duties to the best of their ability? How smart is it to let people die because the Premier's government has not seen fit to inject enough money into restoring the health system? The Premier could have made many choices and he has made the wrong ones. Unfortunately, it is the Queensland people who pay the price. There is no doubt about it: Queensland has a health system in crisis and there is no escape for the Health Minister. Years and years of her neglect and her unsympathetic rhetoric have caught up with her.

Keperra Hospital has a dialysis unit that needs to be retained. The Beattie government has still not assured hospital staff or the public that this service will continue. Mr Beattie must now put his money where his mouth is and fork out the funds for Keperra Hospital renal services and other services. But it is not just happening there, it is everywhere. While the opposition acknowledges that the Beattie government does not have an endless pot of gold, it is actually \$883 million in the red. It has to take responsibility for Queensland's health crisis and look at making health a priority.

Mrs Edmond is far from being the best Health Minister in 50 years, and I am certain that even Mr Beattie would now eat his words. She is not only the worst Health Minister in 50 years, she is the worst Health Minister Queensland has seen. The Premier needs to cut her loose and find someone who can put some life back into the public health system—someone who will advocate and fight for the funding of the public health system, and someone who has sympathy and compassion for the chronically ill and the aged in particular who have a greater need for access to services, rather than a Health Minister who starts questioning whether renal patients and other patients have quality of life and whether they should receive services.