



Speech by

CAROLYN MALE

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (3.00 p.m.): The Health Legislation Amendment Bill puts forward changes to 11 different acts. In most cases these changes are designed to streamline administrative processes, and any move to reduce red tape is to be commended and deserves the full support of this House. The move to make the membership requirements for district health councils more flexible is a welcome move. The work of the councils is far too important to be constrained by vacancies. Two district health councils cover my electorate, and the work they do is invaluable and we certainly appreciate the time and effort they put into their jobs.

Opening up the chiropractors, optometrists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, dentists and dental technicians to competition policy requirements is also needed to ensure open and accountable medical professions. The bill also includes an important provision regarding amending the Nursing Act 1992 to improve public protection. The amendment allows the Queensland Nursing Council the capacity to access criminal histories of applicants for registration, enrolment or for an authorisation to practise midwifery. These changes will mean that applicants who pose a potential risk to patients will not be allowed to practise in Queensland. While some people may have a criminal history, its existence will not automatically prohibit them from practising. It gives the council some flexibility and discretion, but these changes also provide a good safety net, especially if the person is applying for a position which brings them into constant contact with children. There are similar provisions for teachers, and these changes bring nurses and midwives in line with other health practitioners.

Another important change within this bill is the widening of the role of dental therapists to enable them, under the supervision of a dentist, to perform additional functions when they have the required qualifications. I believe this will help ease workloads for dentists and allow greater throughput of patients in the long run.

Health issues have had a lot of public scrutiny of late and many issues about the federal government's appalling record on health administration have been raised in the House. This federal government must be the only government in Australia to actually underspend—and not by \$1 or \$2, but by \$1 billion. Howard is politically astute enough to realise that health is one of his government's very weak areas and has called on his favourite lap-dog, Tony Abbott, to try to carry the portfolio until the next election.

The only saving grace is that he did not appoint former failed minister David Jull as Health Minister. I was certainly outraged to hear Jull's comments about health on a recent edition of the *7.30 Report*. He said that one of the reasons why there were fewer doctors in his area was not because of his government's appalling decisions and the fact that it has underfunded Medicare and refused to deal with the bulk-billing issue; according to David Jull, it was because 55 per cent of medical students are female and after they become doctors these women tend to get married, have kids and leave the industry.

Mr Cummins: Sensitive new age guy!

Ms MALE: He certainly is not! I am sure that if David Jull were Health Minister he would propose a ban on doctors getting married and, as part of their training, medical students should carry out compulsory sterilisation procedures on their fellow students. But, of course, that would apply only to female students. I thought troglodytes like Jull went out with Menzies, but obviously I was wrong. The

only thing that David Jull got right was to say that from the federal perspective the health system was in a terrible mess, and I say it is all of the federal government's own doing.

Today we heard the member for Gregory say that health is an important area and we must all play an integral role. So why is the National Party not standing up to John Howard and demanding more money for our hospitals? Why is the National Party not calling on the federal government to reinstate funding to the dental health program? I think we all remember that one of the first things John Howard did in 1996 was to stop funding for public dental health.

It has been up to this government to take up the provision of this area—a very important area, especially for people in my electorate, to be able to access a public dental health service. But we are certainly struggling to meet the demands out there. I would like to see the surplus that Costello announced—the \$7.5 billion surplus—go into reinstating funding for dental health. It is certainly a federal area of responsibility and they are not coming to the party, yet they announce these extra billions of dollars that they have. They are underspending on health, they underspent on the health agreement and it is Queenslanders who are going to pay the price for that. It is going to be Queenslanders who cannot access the health services they require.

Why will the coalition not stand up to their federal counterparts and fight for a fair deal for Queenslanders? That is the question that I would like answered. I see that there are no National Party members in the chamber to answer that today. They are not even interested enough to sit here and listen to this debate.

While we are on the subject of health, I thought I would take the chance to talk briefly about the Maleny Hospital. It is the only hospital in my electorate as all the other major hospitals are just outside of it. The staff certainly do a fantastic job up there. I have spoken to the Health Minister before about the Maleny Hospital and I want to raise the point in the House that the population is growing in Maleny. The council is certainly allowing additional people to move into the area; they are allowing subdivisions. We would like to see that in the future Maleny Hospital is considered for extended services and the ability for extra nurses to be put on to assist that. We would also like to see a private practitioner open up to provide x-ray services to Maleny. That would make it easy for the whole health system to be met there.

They are just a few of the comments I would like to make about health. Obviously I could go on a lot longer. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the minister for bringing this legislation to the House and also congratulate her staff and, indeed, the staff of Queensland Health for the excellent work they do. I commend the bill to the House.