



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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MEDICARE OFFICE, BRIBIE ISLAND

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (7.03 p.m.): I would like to bring to the attention of the House a valiant effort by two of my constituents, Mr Ron and Mrs Alice Donovan of Bribie Island, who are aged pensioners in their 70s. For two years, their mission has been to get a local Medicare office.

They began their quest by approaching the sitting federal member. They suggested that a full-time office was probably unnecessary at present and that an office open for two or three days per week would be more than adequate. When the Donovans had not heard anything for a while, they approached my electorate office in the hope that there was something that could be done at a state level. After all, it was a federal issue. Discussions led to the drafting of a petition. It read in part—

The petition of certain electors of Australia draws the attention of the House to the Howard government's failure to address issues surrounding the lack of a Medicare office on Bribie Island. We call on the federal government to provide adequate services to the people of Bribie Island, many of whom are elderly and cannot travel to other areas. As Bribie Island is part of one of the fastest growing areas in Queensland, the federal government has an obligation to meet the needs of both the elderly and families by supplying funding to meet this growing community's needs.

The Donovans literally walked the street with their petition and received overwhelming support. They managed to collect over 1,000 signatures during the first three and a half weeks.

As Mr Wayne Swan, the federal Labor member for Lilley and opposition spokesman for families, was visiting a number of the island's residents, the Donovans chose to hand their petition to him to present to federal parliament. They did, and proceeded to tell Wayne and I that they intended to get more signatures. So for the next two months they walked approximately three hours a day, three or four times a week. To help in their collection of signatures they approached several businesses and they were permitted to leave the petition at those businesses so that people could sign it if they were interested. The local papers publicised the Donovan's efforts well, with one story commanding the front page. Consequently, many more residents contacted Ron and Alice eager to sign the petition.

The closest Medicare office to Bribie Island is at Morayfield. It can take over three-quarters of an hour to reach that office by bus. That can be a difficult and tiring journey for the elderly. Often when people visit doctors now they have to pay up front as bulk-billing is not as freely available as it was in the past. A recent article in one paper stated that doctors are deserting bulk-billing and that bulk-billing has hit an all-time low of 69.6 per cent, prompting some people to suggest that free visits to doctors will soon be a thing of the past. If people live on Bribie Island and have to send their medical receipt by mail to Medicare, they have to wait for the cheque. That can take a minimum of four working days. Some members of the community really need their rebate immediately.

I wish to thank the Donovans and everyone else who helped collect the signatures. The rest of the signatures have been sent to Wayne Swan. He has now tabled the petition in federal parliament.

A government member interjected.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I thank the member for that and I take his interjection. We now wait for a reply.