



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (12.15 p.m.): Today I will restore some commonsense to the argument. Once again, it has been left entirely up to the state government to do everything possible to continue to provide a world-class Ambulance Service for all Queensland residents throughout the country. There have been no offers of support from the federal government, which continues to prop up the private health funds, and they in turn have turned a blind eye to pleas from the Premier to reduce their premiums after the introduction of the proposed community ambulance cover as of 1 July this year. The headline 'Health fund won't budge on fees' in a local publication says it all.

Nothing is more odds on than that someone will need an ambulance at some time during his or her lifetime. It is a better bet than any TAB odds-on favourite. Many people have had to use an ambulance and then been presented with a bill for a minimum of about \$702 because they did not contribute to the voluntary ambulance cover.

Ms Keech: Under our new plan that won't happen.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: The member for Albert is right. In fact, \$8 million in unpaid bills has been accumulated by those who have used an ambulance and did not pay their bill. The sad reality is that many costs have soared over the years. The introduction of the GST and the increase in wages last year, which no-one begrudged ambulance officers getting, has seen the Ambulance Service become more expensive to run.

The proposed compulsory ambulance cover will ensure that we maintain the high standards already existing within our Ambulance Service. Yes, there are people who believe the proposed cover is unfair and, yes, I acknowledge that there are some anomalies, and I have made representations to the minister, as have other honourable members. The minister has listened to the point; more exemptions have been made.

Ms Keech: And we appreciate it.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Certainly the people in my electorate have appreciated that. Letters from my local business community indicate their unhappiness with multibilling, but let us put this into perspective. The state government is delivering a scheme which for the very first time will ensure that all Queenslanders have access to ambulance services throughout Australia at all times. Community ambulance cover is not a user pays system; it is a broad based community charge designed to spread the cost of funding our Ambulance Service as widely as possible across the community. Predominantly those people who have access to more income will pay more than once. The government believes that even the smallest business and the smallest investment property holders can absorb or pass on a charge which amounts to 24c a day. People on a low fixed income unable to afford private health cover who have no business interests and who do not own any investment properties—that is, those people who do not have access to income other than the family wage—will pay the levy once only. These are the vast majority of Queenslanders, and they would have had to pay much more had the businesses and investment properties been exempt.

I am led to believe that it would have been as high as \$130 instead of the proposed \$88. Also, the many families—approximately 412,000 of them—who already pay the voluntary ambulance levy would have been asked to pay more. Under this new proposed scheme, they will pay less. They will pay

\$88 instead of the current \$98. That is something that the opposition has failed to mention throughout this entire debate and I believe that is a very important, positive aspect.

Mr Reynolds: If the voluntary subscription scheme had been kept there, they would be paying \$130.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Yes. I take that interjection and I agree entirely with the minister. On reading the explanatory notes kindly provided by the opposition spokesman for emergency services—and I note his presence in the chamber—he would have us believe that a significant proportion of people would be disadvantaged because they would have to pay more than once. That shows how out of touch the opposition really is. The vast majority of people do not have private health cover, the vast majority of people do not own businesses, the vast majority of people do not own investment properties.

Mr Reynolds: Or a beach house.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Or a beach house. Collecting the community ambulance cover through electricity accounts is the most suitable option now available to balance the needs of consumers with the ongoing financial sustainability of the Ambulance Service. Queenslanders have been assured that all funds raised by the community ambulance cover will be spent directly on ambulance services.

The new payment for the ambulance subscription offers a system that is fair for most people. However, when new legislation is introduced by any government, there will always be anomalies. Not everyone's circumstances are the same, but in this case the vast majority of Queenslanders will be better off. People who have never paid before will see the benefits when they require an ambulance—and it could be as early as today that they need one and they will not be slugged two weeks wages.

An unfair example of changed legislation is the gun buyback scheme that was introduced by the federal government. Everyone was told that their Medicare levy would be increased to help buy back privately owned guns. In that case, the majority of people did not own a gun; I certainly did not and I imagine that most members did not, either, yet we had to pay for the small minority who had to sell their guns back to the government.

Speaking of Medicare, which is a well-hidden federal government levy that people pay according to their taxable income—that is, people who earn more pay more—it would be appropriate if the federal government were to add an Australiawide ambulance levy to Medicare, which would ensure consistency and I believe would take out the anomalies that we are now faced with at a state level.

The ambulance levy is for everyone. Therefore, the Beattie Labor government will not do what the Liberals did in Victoria and rip the heart and soul out of the Ambulance Service by privatising it. That may be the opposition's answer to funding the Ambulance Service, but it is not ours. I commend the bill to the House.