



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 26 March 2003

HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (5.05 p.m.): In rising to support this bill I will quote in full a letter from a resident of Warana, one of the many suburbs I am very proud to represent. It is headed 'Top hospital care' and states—

After reading and having all the criticism we have had about Nambour Hospital and staffing, I would like to turn that around. I have been discharged from Nambour Hospital and I cannot speak highly enough of the way I was cared for from the doctors in charge of me through to the nursing staff, down to the cleaners and tea ladies. Nothing was too much trouble for any of them and always with a smile. All medication was explained, plus why it was being given. We must always remember they are all professional people who have studied to reach the top levels and as such deserve the best from government for funding. Special thanks to ward 2E and 2C.

Let me assure the Queensland parliament that the *Sunshine Coast Daily* regularly receives such letters of praise. Many such letters often berate the whingeing and whining vitriol and poison venom that continually flows from the conservative's health spokesperson. State issues are obviously not a priority, as we note her absence from Queensland parliamentary duties in this House as the health legislation is debated.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: Where is she?

Mr CUMMINS: I have been told she is overseas. Queenslanders realise that Labor has rebuilt the state's health system, the largest health capital works program ever undertaken in our nation's history.

One of Queensland Health's greatest assets is its staff. In November last year the Sunshine Coast community welcomed the new building and MRI scanner at the official opening of Nambour Hospital's new clinical services building and MRI—magnetic resonance imaging—unit. The four storey building and MRI unit are part of the hospital's \$29.1 million redevelopment program. The new building includes an expanded emergency department, five new operating theatres, a new intensive care unit, medical records area and provision for future oncology cancer treatment services. The MRI unit will be used in cancer diagnosis to detect tumours of the brain, spinal cord, lung, liver, bone, prostate, endometrium and breast. The installation of the MRI scanner has vastly increased diagnostic capabilities in the Sunshine Coast region. MRIs have advantages over other diagnostic equipment such as x-rays because there are no long-term effects on the patient. It is vital that we provide this state-of-the-art scanner and one of the most powerful diagnostic imaging tools available close to where Nambour people, and indeed all Sunshine Coast people, live at an affordable cost.

The Nambour redevelopment is one of the final major projects in the state government's \$2.8 billion statewide health building program, which has seen about 150 hospitals and community health centres built or redeveloped across the state. Through this program Queenslanders in regional areas of the state now have access to the sorts of health services and health technology they could not even have imagined just a few years ago. The final stages of the redevelopment have included upgraded birthing suites, refurbishment of the former intensive care and operating theatre areas into new accommodation for allied health services, new offices for the anaesthetic department and a new chapel.

On behalf of Sunshine Coast residents, I thank the minister, the cabinet—the entire government—for providing such great services to the residents of the Sunshine Coast. The Nambour General Hospital and the Caloundra health service form part of the Sunshine Coast health service district network of services that provide a comprehensive health service to Sunshine Coast residents.

Over the past five years the population of the Sunshine Coast has virtually exploded and it is now the fastest-growing region in the state. One of the major difficulties with that level of population growth is that it puts a tremendous strain on existing services, particularly health services.

It is also an unfortunate fact that a great many people who can afford private health care or, indeed, have private health care take advantage of the public system, placing an even greater burden on resources. This factor is illustrated in an independent report written by a senior research fellow, Ms Julie Smith. The report states that a—

... new report on private health insurance says the Howard Government's support for the industry strongly favours wealthy households.

Working with new taxation figures the Australia Institute has estimated that around half the current \$2 billion public subsidy for private health insurance is going to the top 20% of taxpayers.

The report itself states in part—

Some affluent Australians may believe they are improving the fairness of the system and helping Medicare by taking out private insurance but the extent of the public subsidy and its unequal distribution exposed in this study means they are being misled.

The report states further—

The report also suggests that the (Federal) Government policy is allowing private health funds to cream off the most profitable part of Australia's health insurance market while leaving an underfunded public hospital system to provide care for the bulk of those with urgent or chronic healthcare needs.

The article citing the report appeared in the *Australian Financial Review*. The *Courier-Mail* also stated—

Queensland will demand the Howard Government boost public hospital funding after accusing it of squandering taxpayer money on private health insurance.

The most compelling argument in regard to the equitable provision of taxpayers' money for health care and services was highlighted in the federal government's 2002-03 budget, in which hospital service did not even rate a mention. How can the federal government deny the states funding for essential services such as health? Every Queensland resident should join our government in lobbying the federal government to increase its funding for education and our universities. I happily support this, because we need to increase the number of doctors and specialist services.

Whilst it is extremely difficult to make up for the lack of infrastructure and forward planning by conservative governments, the Beattie government has recognised the need in the Sunshine Coast region and allocated vast sums of money in an effort to improve the situation. For instance, funding and services at the Caloundra Hospital have been improved and expanded substantially since 1998. In fact, funding for Caloundra Hospital has increased by more than \$1 million since the term of the coalition government in 1998. Staff numbers have also increased from 68.05 full-time equivalent staff in 2000-01 to 84.85 full-time equivalents in 2001-02.

In January this year, we on the Sunshine Coast received some very good news from the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, who announced that four dentists had been appointed to the Sunshine Coast. The three graduates and one experienced dentist have started work with the Sunshine Coast Oral Health Service, which provides free care for pensioners, the unemployed and their dependants, and holders of Seniors Cards. The Queensland dental health service is the largest in Australia and has again been put under increased strain since the federal government decided to stop funding dental care for pensioners and the unemployed in 1996. While other states either reduced services or introduced co-payments, Queensland did not and now provides a service with a budget of approximately \$110 million a year. Our public oral health staff do a magnificent job in treating a large number of people and the appointment of four new dentists on the Sunshine Coast is particularly good news, given that there is a national shortage of dentists. These appointments will mean a more timely service for clients of the Sunshine Coast Oral Health Service.

But that is not all. Sunshine Coast residents will also be pleased to know that dental surgeries at Kawana, Caloundra and Noosa will also undergo an \$85,000 refurbishment as part of the Sunshine Coast's \$5.8 million funding boost in the 2002-03 budget, which is definitely something to smile about.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, it is definitely only from the state budget; we cannot rely on the federal government, which continues to prop up the rich end of town while ignoring those who need a hand up.

A well-appreciated government service is breast cancer screening. BreastScreen Queensland's Nambour service has celebrated 10 years of providing breast cancer screening and assessment services to women in the Nambour and Sunshine Coast area. Since its opening 10 years ago, the Nambour service had screened thousands of women, with approximately 22,500 women screened last year alone. I must give full credit to the staff of the Nambour office for providing a very important service to my community. Four of the original staff, Dr Sue Fox, medical officer; Margie Watson, clinical nurse consultant; Umi McKenzie, chief radiographer; and Leanne Jones, administrative supervisor, have been with the service for the full 10 years and recently were present at the cutting of the cake to celebrate the

centre's tenth birthday. As the minister will acknowledge, I wrote to her about some issues that that service has raised. I know that the minister will take on board those concerns.

It would be remiss of me if I did not commend the Cittamani Hospice Service, which is located at Palmwoods on the Sunshine Coast. That service provides home based care services. I have visited them and I can say that they are a very compassionate, dedicated and hardworking group. Also in Buderim in my electorate is Bloomhill, which is another Sunshine Coast based group of dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly for those who are ill and suffering.

In closing, I take this opportunity to advise parliament of a marvellous project within Nambour that is being undertaken by the Reed Property Group. It has been confirmed that 70 Windsor Road is the future site of the Sunshine Coast Hear and Say Centre. I would like to commend Harry and Margaret Reed and their son, Ken, and his family, because they thoroughly deserve the applause of this House for their ongoing support of the project and, indeed, the great community spirit that they show throughout the coast in fundraisers. I know that the minister appreciates, as we on the Sunshine Coast do, those who put in and do volunteer work. Without that, we would not be able to deliver to all Queenslanders. I commend the minister and all her staff, without naming them individually, and I commend the bill to the House.