



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

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#### **QUEENSLAND HEALTH**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (6.37 p.m.): I join in this debate and support the amendment before the House. I am proud indeed to support the Minister for Health as well as the many fine health professionals right across this state of Queensland. I believe—I am sure I am correct—that we have as good a health system as there is anywhere else in the world and far better than most and better in many ways than those in other states of Australia.

Let me attend, first of all, to the matter of the Atherton Hospital and put on record the situation that has in fact occurred. The member for Tablelands is not being fair at all in her telling of the story. Problems at the Atherton Hospital were raised in August last year when samples of flaking and peeled paint in the maternity ward were submitted for analysis. It was found that the samples contained varying levels of lead contamination. The district executive reacted immediately with a decision which the minister fully supported to move patients out of the ward to protect them and then required Q-Build to conduct an urgent inspection and offer some solutions.

In fact, the minister did exactly the right thing. Had she ignored this situation and agreed to just paint over the lead contaminated paint, which presents a safety risk to the patients and to the staff, then the member for Tablelands would have had a basis for calling public meetings and causing public furore. Instead, what the minister did was put together that problem along with other demands and needs at the hospital to come up with a million-dollar solution which puts Atherton Hospital much better off than it was before. A maternity area will be created, which I know the staff of the hospital have been wanting for some years, and that will provide other services in dialysis and chemotherapy that are sorely needed on the Tablelands. The member for Tablelands should in fact be praising the Minister for Health. If she were not a whinger, if she were not one of the two One Nation members who only ever measure against some hypothetical standards of perfection and therefore criticise absolutely everything that any human being on this earth, including members of this government, do, she would recognise that Atherton Hospital has received good and fair attention.

**Ms LEE LONG:** I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. I find those comments offensive and I ask the member to retract them.

**Ms BOYLE:** I withdraw. Let me turn now to the issue of the Cairns Base Hospital. I have to tell members, if they do not already know, that the Cairns Base Hospital is the best hospital in this state. It has been and it is still. It is better than the Townsville General Hospital and it is better than the Royal Brisbane Hospital. We are up there pioneering in all kinds of ways in health. We have a massive geographic area to look after. We have a large proportion of the population who are not in good health and who do not come from healthy backgrounds, particularly our indigenous brothers and sisters. We have no other major hospitals close by to help us out. We have staff who are excellent in all fields and who do very well with the demands put upon them not only by locals or people from the region but even from tourists from other countries. Yes, it was time for a review and it has been a good review.

Out of that review we are rejigging how Cairns Base Hospital is run. The quality of the service has never been a problem, but, yes, it is true that we can improve the admission centre. Yes, it is true that we need to redesign how our rehab services are provided, and the town will welcome that. Yes, it is also true that we have had too many staff as casuals and that that is not cost effective. I have no doubt that the nursing staff will welcome the reorganisation of those staff on to proper contracts.

In fact, I have to confront members on the opposite side of the House with the facts. How dare they suggest that there are declining resources! In fact, the level of resources put into the Health budget over the last four years increased by six per cent a year. Over the last four years, we have increased the Health budget by 25 per cent. In fact, the last Health budget for the year 2002-03 was \$4.33 billion. We are getting very little help from the federal government. If members opposite really cared about the health of Queenslanders, they would get their federal colleagues to put the money fairly and squarely through the Commonwealth health care agreement and into the public health of Queensland instead of into the private sector. We do extraordinarily well considering the lack of support we get from the federal government.

On the dental issue, do members opposite know how much Queensland Health provides for oral services? \$110 million! In New South Wales it is \$98 million. Who has the bigger population? New South Wales! But Queensland is ahead of the other states in that regard. Instead of whingeing at us, the member should try whingeing at her federal colleagues.