



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (11.59 p.m.): In rising to speak against the Beattie government's new ambulance levy, I have to state that in the two years that I have been in this place, this piece of legislation has to be the most unpopular and has been the focus of vehement opposition among the Queensland public. The proposed ambulance levy that is before this House is unfair and unjust. I find it incredible that this government, knowing that the Ambulance Service was in dire financial straits, would go ahead and make all pensioners and health care cardholders exempt from payment and in their place put the financial burden onto the rest of the community in a completely haphazard manner. This is nothing but extremely poor financial management.

There is no doubt that this government is determined to destroy small business and landowners, which historically have always been the enemy of totalitarian states, which is what this state, under the Beattie government, is turning into. To place the financial burden of propping up the Queensland Ambulance Service on the workers in this state is appalling. To add salt to the wound, the Minister for Emergency Services has the hide to insult business owners by calling them insular for not wanting to pay more than their fair share for the levy.

Not only do small business owners have to pay this levy on their home electricity accounts, but they also have to pay it on their places of business. People such as builders are going to suffer greatly because of their need to use builder's poles. I know of one builder who is building four houses at once. He will have to pay the levy on his home electricity account, his office building electricity account, and on the electricity account for each house that he is building. The Premier's reasoning is that people get sick at work. But these people have already paid for their use of an ambulance when they pay their home electricity account. Or is there going to be a specific area on the bill outlining that the person who pays this account is covered only at the place to which the electricity charged on this account is connected?

The piece de resistance of this new levy has to be the threat to turn off a person's power should they not pay the ambulance levy component of their bill. To take away a resource as vital as electricity, even if the electricity account has been paid, is inhumane. The despotic behaviour of the Premier and the complete lack of compassion of this government is beyond belief. I ask members to imagine the scenario of a single mother who is working to send her kids to school, to feed them and to clothe them. Her electricity account is due and she has just enough to pay it. But little junior needs to go to the dentist. This single mother cannot afford to pay her ambulance levy. So in the middle of a cold winter, this family's electricity is turned off—no hot water, no heating, no hot food, no clean clothes, no lighting. I wonder if anyone has had the sense to think about people who have cordless phones. If those people have their electricity cut off, then they will not be able to call for an ambulance should they require one. How many unnecessary deaths are going to result from this levy and who is going to take the responsibility for them?

In addition to paying for the levy on home electricity accounts and possibly numerous times on business electricity accounts, this government will still expect Queenslanders to continue to pay a levy on their registration. This tyrannical government will be remembered for restricting our democratic rights and pitting one section of society against the other. Workers already pay taxes and a Medicare levy to look after aged pensioners and those who do not work.

This government knows that the majority of its support comes from those who are in receipt of social services. The promise to exempt them all from contributing to the Queensland Ambulance Service is designed to ensure their continued voting support. The political motivation of this scheme is to make these people utterly dependent upon this government for their survival.

Levy or tax, it does not matter what this government wants to call it, it all boils down to Queenslanders paying more money to this government. In the future, the Premier might want to put a little more thought behind his election promises to one section of the community when the rest of the community has to pay for it.

This levy is the least thought out and most damaging piece of legislation that this government has forced on the Queensland public thus far. If I were the Premier, I would be looking very carefully at my advisers, because someone is trying to bring him down from inside. With harebrained schemes such as this one, they are bound to be successful.