



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.05 p.m.): I rise to oppose the Community Ambulance Cover Bill. Premier Beattie came out and promised that there would be no new taxes, and here we see a new tax—an unfair tax, an inequitable tax in how it is being applied. He has broken his promise to the people of Queensland and he has also broken the budget of this state. Five years ago the Ambulance Service was funded, operational and providing high professional standards and within five years we have seen this government break its promises, break the ambulance budget and break the budget of the Queensland people.

I have listened to some Labor members trying to flick their responsibility off and then say, 'It's not a big problem. I haven't had many letters or phone calls.' I think that they must have been taking an awfully long holiday, because I have had more calls and emails and letters about this issue than any other issue in the last few years aside from the insurance issue. What I see is a great deal of anger from people who were paying their ambulance levy via other means—that is, single people who were paying a lesser fee than what is being proposed and businesspeople paying their ambulance levy under other measures—and now they are finding that this government is saying, 'You can lump it. You're going to have to pay multiple times and we don't care.' The Labor members in this parliament who get up in this place and defend that should hang their heads in shame. This is a broken promise of a broken government that has a track record of other Labor governments in delivering fewer services with higher taxes and breaking the budgets of the people who have fought over the years to build up these professional services.

Let us look at the promises that were given by this government. There was the very nice, warm and fuzzy promise—and we welcomed it—of providing free ambulance services to pensioners. This parliament and the people of Queensland were lied to by the government with regard to the funding for that promise. It was an unfunded promise. It was supposed to, according to the government, cost only about \$20 million. The real cost has been \$120 million. And surprise, surprise! Now we see that there is a \$100 million black hole in the ambulance budget. I have been talking to many people—from the battlers through to those businesspeople trying to employ people—and they are angry that they have been lied to by this government, angry that the Premier's promise for no new taxes has been broken, angry that they are still going to be up for multiple taxes on top of what they have already been paying.

Members have spoken about the inequity of this system, and I will give the House some examples. Let us take, say, a caravan park where there are hundreds of residents but only one Energex meter running into that place because of the way many caravan parks are metered. In that case there will only be one ambulance bill for hundreds of residents. However, if a pensioner has somebody boarding and living with them—they are paying their way—that means that they will have to pay the ambulance levy.

Let us look at the position of a business owner with a number of premises in different locations—or, for example, a storage shed—who is providing jobs for young Queenslanders. From the response of some Labor members, one would think that these people are rolling in money. These people do not appreciate being the milch cows for this government's failed economics. They do not appreciate being told to put up with it and that they have to pay this tax not once or twice but, in some cases, five or six times. Some of these people are not wealthy, and I can understand how angry and upset they are.

Let us look at some of the other inequitable situations. In some parts of the state people who are not even in range of an ambulance service will be paying this levy five or six times. That stopped some of the interjections and heckling from the backbenches.

Mr Cummins interjected.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! The member for Kawana is on the speaking list and can speak later. Likewise for the member for Pumicestone.

Miss SIMPSON: What about those people who are paying for service but who will not have access to it? Government members should hang their heads in shame. This is a large state, and the way in which people will be taxed to make up for the hole that this government created through its rust-bucket accounting is a disgrace. It is time that the books were opened and audited fully. Let us look at the expense accounts for the running of some government services in this state. Let us look at the cost of the bureaucracy. Let us look at how the books are being managed, given that we now see a \$100 million black hole due to this minister's, this government's and his predecessor Labor minister's handling of this situation.

I will be making it well known to the constituents on the Sunshine Coast that Labor members have voted in favour of multiple taxation without equitable consideration of genuine hardship and without genuine consideration of the fact that the way this levy has been introduced via electricity bills is unfair. In addition, this will not deal with the black hole, which will increase due to the problems that will be experienced through increased demand. That has also been a warning from ambulance officers. We deserve to have a properly funded service, not this amateur hour where we have seen a hundred-million-dollar black hole emerge suddenly only six months after the last state budget.

Let us look at the way this levy has been attached to electricity bills. One of the concerns I have raised—and I challenge the minister on this—relates to the emergency rescue helicopter on the Sunshine Coast, which raises funding through a voluntary levy collected via electricity bills and which provides substantial resources for running that outstanding service. I ask the minister: if that service sees a fall-off in the payment of that voluntary levy as a result of his mandatory levy, will he give a guarantee to this parliament that he will make up the difference? Will the minister make up the difference if that voluntary levy falls off as a result of the mandatory levy going into the Ambulance Service?

Mr Reynolds: Do you want me to answer that now?

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, I do.

Mr Reynolds: Can I say to you that all those discussions are taking place, and we are absolutely intent on ensuring that, the same with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the same with Energex Sunshine Coast, we will be marketing and promoting together and we will do that very well, I can assure you.

Miss SIMPSON: Will the minister give a guarantee that if the voluntary levy falls off as a result of the government's mandatory imposition on electricity bills he will make up the difference?

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! This is not question time. If the member is going to make a speech, she should do so.

Miss SIMPSON: The minister did not give that guarantee. That is a real and valid concern.

The other issue with respect to electricity bills is that we have already heard in this parliament that the government has gone after a special dividend, a special extraction of money, out of the electricity providers over and above their usual dividends based on the revaluation of their assets. We have also heard in this parliament from coalition members that there will be a six per cent increase in the domestic tariff for electricity users in this state despite the fact that the wholesale prices have fallen. So here is the double whammy: not only will electricity users end up with a six per cent increase in their electricity bill despite the fact that the wholesale price of electricity has gone down; they will have an increase because of the way this government is double taxing the government owned electricity authorities, and they will also have to face this new ambulance tax.

I have heard members opposite trying to say that it is not a tax, it is a levy. At the end of the day, they cannot pass the buck. This is a new tax. They have broken their promise and they have broken the funding of the Ambulance Service. They have not inspired any confidence that this is the answer to properly funding, running, operating and managing the Ambulance Service. It is time that the books were opened. It is time that a new minister and people were put in charge who can manage and be open and accountable and make sure that this vital service is available to people throughout Queensland and that areas that have seen a fall-off in access to service have that service returned. One of our most vital services is ensuring that people get quick and appropriate clinical access to their emergency services.