



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.15 p.m.): Firstly, I want to acknowledge and thank the staff who supported our committee and other committee members in this process. I believe the estimates process has benefit but, quite frankly, a lot more could be gained if we moved to a Senate style estimates process, where there is an ability to question and talk more with the departmental staff to get down to the true nitty-gritty of the underlying basics of the budget. If there is a criticism of the estimates processes, it is that. We have come to the stage where there is a tendency for ministers to filibuster and not answer questions, and the process is designed to block information rather than enlighten the public.

The lack of really meaningful performance indicators in the Queensland budget papers, I think, is extremely disappointing. The Health Department has one of the largest budgets of government, and yet it has one of the poorest presentations as far as the amount of information that is available on some quite large sections of the budget.

I want firstly to turn my attention to the emergency departments and the lack of new real growth funding for Queensland hospital emergency departments. We have been hearing the Premier and the Health Minister say how concerned they are about growth in emergency departments, yet this budget does nothing to address the growth. In fact, they have capped the growth that they expect in this area—the most critical area of acute care where people presenting are needing to be seen in Queensland hospitals. Last year on the budget papers they saw 750,000 people presenting for treatment in emergency departments, and yet for this coming financial year they have the same target for last year's presentation—750,000. That is capping, not addressing, growth. I believe it is playing a very dangerous game with people's lives, and is putting unfair and undue pressure on the very hardworking staff in these areas.

We know there has been a significant growth in presentation to emergency departments, particularly in the higher acuties. This capping and the lack of any real growth funding for emergency departments is most dangerous and contrary to what is happening in other states. Even New South Wales in its budget papers has budgeted for something like 14 times the amount of new money for emergency departments which was available in this budget. During the estimates hearing I asked the minister and her departmental staff how many new staff would be employed from this \$2.2 million of additional emergency department funding, and the answer came back that there would be no new staff for emergency departments. All this despite the Premier and the Health Minister saying how concerned they are about the pressure on emergency departments. Yet they do not put their money where their mouth is and they have not in these budget papers provided for one extra staff member in emergency departments. That is from the estimates hearing, which is on the *Hansard* record, and that is a disgrace.

We already know that there has been high growth in those higher acuity levels. We also know, from talking to experts in emergency medicine, that the triage system of category 1 to 5 does not mean that 4s and 5s can be taken for granted as GP-type patients. In fact, the research and the statistics are showing that a high proportion of those people actually do require hospital based treatment. The lack of understanding by the Premier and the Health Minister is scary. There is no real growth funding in this budget. It is totally out of step with what is happening in one of our neighbouring Labor states and a dangerous impost when one considers that the government has capped the projected figures for emergency departments in this state to the same level that was expected last year.

Let us talk about how this government claims to spend more but delivers less. Take dental health—adult and child oral health. They claim to have spent more and they have claimed to have employed more staff, but 51,000 fewer treatments have been performed on children and adults. It is interesting to note that children have always been funded by the state and we have seen a significant fall-off in the amount of treatment of children. This government claims to have spent more on oral health and it claims to have employed more people, but it treated 51,000 fewer children and adults. That is a disgrace. It is typical of the mismanagement by a government that does not want to be accountable to the people.

Time expired.