



Speech by

JO-ANN MILLER

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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AMBULANCE LEVY

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (6.36 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment and, on behalf of the people of Bundamba, to commend the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Emergency Services for developing a universal scheme for Queensland ambulance cover.

Community ambulance cover is designed to be shared throughout the community as widely as possible to keep the charge down, which is why both residential and business accounts are being charged. The motion put by the opposition seems to lack any understanding of how the levy has been calculated and what powers the state may have in this regard. I take this opportunity to explain to members opposite the intricacies and assumptions on which the levy is based.

Mr Lawlor: So pay attention.

Mrs MILLER: They should pay attention. In determining the number of electricity accounts that will attract the community ambulance cover charge, the commencement point was in fact the 1,650,000 franchise customers of Energex and Ergon. This is generally reflected as 90 per cent domestic accounts and 10 per cent non-domestic accounts. As the government is continuing to honour and directly fund its commitment to provide free ambulance services to pensioners and Seniors Card holders, we have to then remove these accounts from the revenue base.

In recognition of significant multiple billing in rural areas, a downward adjustment has also been made for sheds and irrigation and stock and water pumps used for farming purposes. Also deducted from the commencement point is an estimate of core infrastructure for local governments, for example accounts relating to water and sewerage facilities and state government agencies such as police stations and courthouses. Accounts in the name of Commonwealth agencies have been excluded based on advice that the Constitution precludes a state placing the charge on accounts related to Commonwealth owned property without the Commonwealth's agreement. An increase in the number of accounts could then be included to account for facilities with on-supply arrangements.

Adjustments were also made to the customer base not covered by Energex and Ergon, including country energy customers in the Goondiwindi and Inglewood areas. Estimates of these various adjustments were based on a variety of data sources, such as information from the Office of Energy, high level data from Energex and Ergon, ABS statistics and the Department of Families. Due to the nature of some of these adjustments and estimates, it is not possible to provide a definite quantum of collection from either domestic or non-domestic accounts. However, one could estimate that approximately 10 per cent could be collected from business.

I take it from the opposition's motion that no business would pay the levy, as owners would claim to have already paid it on their principal place of residence. Why should the burden be placed only on families and on households? I assume that is what the opposition proposes—either that or short-changing the Ambulance Service. To collect the charge only through residential electricity accounts would have raised the charge to above \$100, unfairly burdening families and households. Moreover, businesses have the added ability of passing on and recouping costs incurred through their operations.

I would also point out that for businesses the community ambulance cover will, depending on the individual circumstances, attract a tax deduction. Needless to say, despite the opposition's simplistic approach to this issue, this government has been considering options to extend exemptions in certain circumstances where collection would appear onerous. However, unlike the opposition, the Beattie

Labor government is intent on ensuring that the Ambulance Service is not short-changed and that it is provided with a scheme that works.

In this regard, the work of the Community Ambulance Cover Implementation Unit has already been spoken about this evening, and I know many members have already made comments and referred comments to this unit that have assisted in its deliberations and ongoing discussions. Despite the objections of members opposite, the Beattie Labor government will succeed in providing ambulance cover for all Queenslanders and will make sure that the service is properly funded so that it can continue well into the future. While the exact details of the final scheme will be available when the legislation is introduced into this House, one thing can be counted on, and that is that no Queenslanders will receive an invoice from the Queensland Ambulance Service for transport used after 1 July.