



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL, MLA
STATE MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 26 March 2003

AMBULANCE LEVY

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.57 p.m.): This debate has had the lot. We have had the sugar industry. I tell you what, I never thought we would hear 'the communists are under the beds' again. The only reason we had communists under the beds under the Nationals is that people had to lie there because they could not get a decent ambulance to take them to the hospital, because it was not a properly funded service! We would not even need this debate tonight if people did one thing—voluntarily subscribed to the Ambulance Service. We need to work out how to get people to voluntarily subscribe. In the absence of that, what do we do? We have a current system where people who subscribe financially carry non-subscribers. Members opposite have referred to equity. What is the equity in that? If the non-subscribers use the system, invariably they are chased up to pay what they owe. The opposition says it does not want people paying more than once. I must say that that is a novel proposition for the National Party. The difficulty facing Queenslanders is to get everybody to pay even once. How many do not pay even once? One million people. One million Queenslanders are non-subscribers. We have not heard from our friend the Leader of the Opposition as to how he will get those people to pay voluntarily just once.

Some people are paying twice now—that is a fact. They are subscribers in private health funds who have emergency ambulance cover and who subscribe to the ambulance. They do not understand that we spend more than \$2 billion in Australia to encourage people to take out private health cover. Forty-four per cent of Australians have done just that—and there is the rub. People are opting out of ambulance subscriptions, leaving a financial shortfall because they are in private health funds with ambulance cover.

The Queensland ambulance system only receives the funds from the health funds when the service is deemed payable from the insurer to the Queensland Ambulance Service, so the burden is carried solely by ambulance subscribers. Members opposite are on about equity. Can they tell me what is fair about that? There is nothing fair about it.

As a state government it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a levy that is fair to everyone. That is why the Premier has written to the Prime Minister to ask for the levy that is fair to everyone. Taking the money out of the Medicare levy is a fair system. Everyone would pay. Over the years the Queensland government has tried to secure this, but what has been the result? It has been rejected out of hand.

The Leader of the Opposition should convince his federal government to support this proposal. I wish him the best of luck, because the federal Health Minister was too arrogant even to attend a health ministers' meeting to discuss health issues. It will hardly be interested in funding a national ambulance system. In the absence of federal government cooperation, we have this proposal.

The opposition says that it wants business to pay once. As I have said, that is a novel proposition because it is certainly not the principle that the National Party endorsed when it introduced the fire levy. Stage 1 of the National Party fire levy introduced a levy for residential houses, units and—wait for it—vacant land. Those are all the things that the opposition now says are unjust, but when in government it did precisely that with the fire levy. In 1985, what did the National Party do? It introduced a levy for owners of residential, commercial and industrial properties. So it was okay for the National Party to levy businesses more than once, but apparently it is the ruination of small business when we do it. Its hypocrisy is complete.

I congratulate the member for Toowoomba South. He said all of this without breaking into a smile. The Oscars are over, my friend. He would have qualified. Where do members opposite get off coming in here and crying crocodile tears about small business? The fact is this: the National Party is the party of prayer. It will spend all night praying for you and, as it showed by the fire levy, it will spend all day preying on you. I do not want to see a return to the bad old National Party days when dedicated ambulance officers had to go around to shopping centres with a pocket full of tickets raffling off a few dead chooks wrapped in cellophane to help fund the Ambulance Service.