



Speech by

**Mr L. SPRINGBORG**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

---

Hansard 28 May 2003

### **COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL**

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.02 p.m.): Not wishing to plough old ground, I—

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan:** Great!

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Particularly the old ground that has been ploughed by the Labor Party backbenchers seeking to justify this unjustifiable legislation.

It is true that in the time this legislation has been before this parliament and during all of the shenanigans leading up to its introduction, enormous concern has been expressed to me from within my electorate and from other areas of Queensland as I have travelled through them. The concerns are particularly from small businesspeople and those who have more than one domestic power meter. There are many circumstances in which that is the case. The member for Warrego mentioned some of those cases a moment ago.

I have in my possession a letter from an elderly couple that has four small properties in my electorate. They have four houses which are not lived in—they are in a state of disrepair—however, they keep the power connected to them because they are going to slowly go through and renovate those properties as they get the money. They will be paying this levy on four occasions. That situation is not dissimilar to that facing other people. There are people with security lights on power poles and so on. Small businesspeople are having to pay on multiple occasions.

Basically, this government had to do something as a consequence of its own failure to cost its promise of free ambulance services to pensioners. That was its policy. That is fine—I do not have a problem with it—but it should have been costed correctly. The government should not have to go out there and put something in place and say, 'This levy is about providing a world-class ambulance service. This is about giving a better ambulance service.' In reality, it is about providing the same ambulance service. It is about providing the ambulance service which people would have otherwise had.

Of course, technology enhancements will occur as a part of the process of technological change. That is nothing new. The government does not deserve accolades for saying, 'We are going to give you a world-class ambulance service.' The government would deserve condemnation if it did not. The real issue here is that the government has had to raise money because it has not properly balanced the books in this regard. The government has inequitably shifted the burden of this on to a few people to pay the levy, in many cases, on multiple occasions.

We have a philosophical difference to the government on this issue. Those opposite obviously believe that it is fine for many people to pay on multiple occasions. In one example I heard on radio the other day, a person said that he would be paying 27 times. There are many instances of small businesspeople with a domestic residence, a security light and so on who will be paying three or four times. I think that is absolutely unjustifiable.

People have said to me that they have no problem whatsoever with paying such a levy once. They think that it is a fair thing to do. But paying it on multiple occasions when there are many people out there who will not be paying it at all is not fair. I am talking about the pensioners. We understand Labor's policy—it was elected on that—but the problem we have is that it did not properly cost it. Other issues—for example, people who would otherwise have been paying the ambulance services before who will not be paying for them in the future—concern us, and I think justifiably so.

My electorate has some peculiarities. I have been informed that they have been sorted out, but not without some degree of difficulty for those people involved. There are many people in northern New South Wales who use ambulance services either in Stanthorpe or Warwick because there is no ambulance service near them. It is not their fault that they use the Stanthorpe or Warwick ambulance services. Stanthorpe, Warwick, Killarney or Goondiwindi are their local communities of interest. They used to pay a subscription to the Queensland Ambulance Service and they were picked up when they were in need. I am led to understand that under this proposal those people will have to subscribe to their equivalent system in New South Wales. They will be transported in Queensland and that will be charged back against their system in New South Wales. That sounds complicated to me. We have to ensure that those people are aware of that. Members might ask why I am concerned about people in New South Wales. They are people as well, they play an active part in the communities in my area and they have some concern and some distress over this.

The National-Liberal coalition has a very simple philosophy. Our principle is that no person should pay more than once. It is as simple as that. As I have moved around Queensland over recent times—people are raising this with me; I am not raising it with them—the model that has been suggested is that each person should pay once and it should be based on the electoral roll. I doubt there would be a person in this parliament who has not heard that suggestion. We can debate the logic of it—

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I am not sure. The minister has heard it. He would probably have to establish an administrative process over in the Queensland Electoral Commission which would be quite significant. There is no doubt about it.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I understand, but I am not convinced that the minister's system is terribly workable, either. That is the difficulty with a process of raising money for universal ambulance cover which impacts unfairly on some, once on others and, for others who will be using the service, probably not at all. I know that the minister has explained the issue of universality and all of those sorts of things, but there is still an issue of equity in there. Taking out the pensioner issue, I think there is still an issue of equity that has not necessarily been addressed in this.

I have been informed by people in the Ambulance Service that when the minister's promise came into effect a couple of years ago—once again that was his promise—there was a significant upsurge in the number of certain people using the Ambulance Service; that is their right. Those people in the Ambulance Service are concerned that when this legislation comes into effect there will be another significant impact on ambulance resources as a consequence of universality. The minister has probably heard this. He will dismiss it.

**Mr Reynolds:** Your facts are wrong. When the pensioner policy came in there was no significant increase in services.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Regardless of whether it was one year or two years after it was introduced or immediately, all I am saying is that I have heard it from people in the service. Whether it is one year or two years, the minister indicated there was an increase at some stage. We can try to strip out the consequences. All I am saying is that I did not make that up; I heard it from within the service. I think we need to be concerned about what this will ultimately do, the real impact of this and whether it is a fair and equitable impact. By and large, I just reinforce the view and the resolve of the coalition, and that is that we will not be supporting this bill.