



Speech by

LEX BELL, MP

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 28 May 2003

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (12.23 p.m.): Those in the House who have good memories may recall that some time ago, when the opposition moved a motion against the government's approach to this matter of ambulance funding, I actually supported the government's approach and at that time I voted with the government at the division. Therefore, I thought that I should stand for a few moments and explain briefly why I am not supporting the government now on this bill and why I will be voting against the bill.

It is acknowledged that the majority of our population support having an efficient Ambulance Service and also support the proper funding of that service. I must concede quite sincerely that the proposal to fund the Ambulance Service through electricity accounts is a far better alternative than the previous idea of funding it through an additional levy on rates notices issued by local authorities. But I cannot in all fairness and in all conscience support this provision, which provides that some people will pay a multiplicity of times. Certainly, the minister and the government have tried to address some of the anomalies in the scheme that came forward, but that does not go far enough. It is certainly not satisfactory to say that some people have to pay a number of times in order to keep down the amount that would be payable by those who pay only once.

I make no bones about it: this is a form of taxation. It is a tax for a legitimate government purpose. One of the important aspects of any tax is that it shall be levied fairly and equitably. It is not possible for the state government to levy a poll tax, that is, a tax that is the same for every citizen within its jurisdiction. That would not be in accordance with the Australian Constitution. I also acknowledge that, in any event, the government does not have an efficient database from which to make such a levy or a tax. But I am very concerned about the mechanics of this particular levy or tax. The mechanics are not fair. One cannot just say, 'This is a very important issue, therefore some people must put up with the unfairness'. The constituents of the electorate of Surfers Paradise most certainly do not feel that way. They feel that this is unfair, and therefore I must vote against this bill.