



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Tuesday, 31 August 2004

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2004

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.50 p.m.): I rise to support the disallowance motion predominantly because the ambulance levy or the ambulance tax—whatever one would like to call it—is a fee that has been imposed on the community that, in principle, people in my electorate, and I am sure in most electorates, support. They support the principle of paying a levy. In fact, a lot of people in my electorate were ambulance subscribers. They reminded my office and anyone else who would listen at the time that the ambulance levy was put in place that they would happily pay the levy once. I can only think of one person who indicated an unwillingness to pay the levy. Overwhelmingly, people said that they were happy to pay the levy. But it was the imposition of two, three or more payments on an individual that they objected to.

The government stated at the time that all of the money from the levy would go to the Queensland Ambulance Service. Currently, I have a question on notice to the Treasurer because at estimates time I endeavoured to find out: how much money was actually gained by Treasury from the levy; what amounts were taken out by the electricity industry for administration; what moneys were taken out by Treasury for administration; and how much money actually went to the Department of Emergency Services for expenditure in the ambulance area. Whilst the Treasurer is still within time to answer that question—I am not saying that he is out of time—I am still waiting to get that information. People are yet to be convinced that all of the money that they put into this ambulance levy is being realised and is being apportioned to the Queensland Ambulance Service.

Mr Mackenroth: All of that is on board.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The Treasurer interjects that they are getting that and more. I am sure that the community will be encouraged to find that out empirically. To raise the levy after 12 months, albeit by CPI, is a move that I believe the community objects to strenuously. Anyone I have talked to about the CPI increase has been angry about an increase this early in the piece. The Treasurer will defend the increase by saying that it is increasing by CPI. Until people see a flow through in benefits from the actual levy at home, at work or anywhere else, then they will not accept it.

Mr Cummins: What about the Boyne Island Ambulance Station?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The Boyne Island Ambulance Station is welcomed. It has been on the books for construction for about four years. Whilst it is welcomed that it is finally there, it is not because of this levy that it is there; it is there because of other funding.

The ambulance service in my electorate covers a very diverse area. Geographically, they cover over six and half thousand square kilometres. We still have a number of single officer ambulance stations. Mount Larcom has an officer plus one on call. Calliope is still a single officer station. That is very concerning because it covers quite a significant geographical area back into the Boyne Valley and it covers highway accidents.

Of more concern at the moment is the Gladstone Ambulance Station. Staff rosters have been reduced. I acknowledge on the record that the minister is investigating these concerns. I thank the minister for that. We do not have any answers back, but I thank the minister for taking on board some issues raised, I think, during the last parliamentary sitting. His office has been in contact with my office and I have had a number of discussions about that. I acknowledge that.

The issue that is being investigated currently is that the night shift has been reduced to two people. In the week encompassing 20 August there were two people on night shift. One was sent to Rockhampton to cover that station. I am yet to be convinced why Gladstone ambulance officers were sent up to the Rockhampton Ambulance Station when they have closer ambulance stations and a significantly higher staffing allocation than Gladstone has. The other officer was sent to Miriam Vale, so there was no-one on night shift in Gladstone. The day staff, who had already worked 10 hours, were put on call. Those staff attended four callouts through the night.

When we have the ambulance service in situ facing situations like this, the community at large will find an increase in the levy this early in the piece very unpalatable and unacceptable. It is on that basis that I will support the disallowance motion.