



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

Hansard Tuesday, 31 August 2004

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## **COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2004**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.31 p.m.): I am speaking in support of the disallowance motion that has been moved by the Opposition Leader. At the outset, when this ambulance tax was introduced, we felt it was unfair. It was introduced by the government to save its skin because it got itself into a mess. How many messes have we seen? We have seen the power mess, we have seen the mess with children who are in need of care and protection, and we saw the ambulance mess when the government made a promise during the election campaign that it would provide free ambulance services for people over the age of 60. It had not properly researched it, it was not able to fund it and it got itself into a major financial hole. As a result, it then had to go out and introduce this new tax simply because it made a promise at an election time when there was supposed to be an amount of trust around. We could not trust the Labor government. It had not properly researched it, it did not know the full cost implications, it was a wild promise and then it had to bring in this new tax because the costs of implementing the scheme were way above any estimates it had made, if in fact it had even made an estimate.

On that basis, we have always opposed the unfairness of the ambulance tax, particularly the unfairness faced by all those people who have had to pay it many times over. There are a lot of people in our community who have always subscribed to the ambulance and, in addition, provided all sorts of donations to the Ambulance Service. Many of those people now have to pay the levy a number of times. They object to it and they object to the basic unfairness of it. I heard the member for Nudgee say that the National Party said that we would get rid of it. We said at the election that we would review it, but our promise was that no-one would pay it more than once, to get rid of the basic unfairness of the system.

One of the reasons we are moving this disallowance motion tonight, in addition to the unfairness of the scheme from the outset, is that we noticed there was an increase of 9.2 per cent in the QAS budget but there was a 13 per cent increase in levy revenue. We only have to look at the number of houses going up in the south-east of the state and the number of people coming into the state to see the extra money that will come from these levies which are based on each person's electricity account. On that subject, that was another diversion for the retail power authorities. Instead of concentrating on getting the power right, they have been running around on behalf of the government collecting the ambulance tax. They have been collecting the levy instead of ensuring a proper and decent power supply and preventing the blackouts that have occurred.

Since the introduction of a compulsory ambulance tax people have expected that they would be able to get an ambulance service. I would like to thank Mr Marc Rowell, the member for Hinchinbrook, for the work he has put in on behalf of a constituent of mine who was very concerned about an old lady who was a friend of hers and who had been like a mother to her. This old lady I think was 78 years of age. She was in the final stages of cancer, was unable to work, had tumours throughout her body, was having continual radiation therapy and was in a lot of pain. This lady went down from Toowoomba to help this old lady on a day when she had to be transferred from the Mater Hospital to the PA Hospital for particular tests and brought back to the Mater Hospital.

The whole process commenced at 10 a.m. The lady from Toowoomba had to return to Toowoomba at 2 p.m. after sitting with this old lady at the PA Hospital where she was waiting for transfer back to the Mater Hospital. That transfer back to the Mater Hospital did not occur until 11 o'clock that night. So she spent all afternoon and half the night waiting for a transfer back to the Mater Hospital. She was told all the time when the people sitting with her asked for a transfer back that the ambulance officers were not authorised to take her back to the hospital. Finally, late in the night, a lovely ambulance officer gave her the help and support she needed and I think used a bit of force to get a service to take this poor old lady back to the Mater Hospital.

That should not occur. The minister has responded to our shadow minister and has expressed regret for any discomfort experienced by this lady, but people expect when they pay a compulsory levy that there will be a reasonable modicum of service provided. I think it is a good example of a Labor government that has simply got itself into a financial mess, whacked a compulsory tax onto people but has not brought about any improvement in the service. There is no extra money for the Ambulance Service out of this. All that happened is that this money was used to soak up a black hole of deficit and debit that had been incurred by a government that had wantonly gone out and put forward a promise at election time that financially it could not sustain. For those reasons, I will be joining my colleagues in voting for the disallowance of this regulation.