



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Tuesday, 31 August 2004

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT REGULATION No. 1) 2004

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (5.35 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition to disallow the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004. I receive many complaints from constituents regarding the ambulance levy, and I have grave concerns with what many people perceive to be a grossly unfair tax and an unfair system of gathering revenue. For example, people who have a fishing hut which is used once a year have to pay two full ambulance taxes. People who have power to the shed in their backyard on separate meters have to pay two levies. Miners who work away from home have to live in rented accommodation whilst they are on shift and then drive home for their days off. They pay two ambulance levies. People I know who own their own business and homes in Charters Towers have recently purchased a home on the coast so they can retire. They currently pay three ambulance levies. There are people in our small regional towns who do not have full-time ambulance officers in attendance. For example, the township of Greenvale, which is 200 kilometres from the nearest medical service, has an ambulance but no ambulance officer, nor does it have a driver.

Another disappointing factor is that these people pay an ambulance levy in the township and are unable to drive that ambulance during emergencies as there are no public servants, and laws prohibit locals who are not public servants or ambulance staff from driving the vehicle. I believe legislation should be changed so that members of these rural communities can do defensive driving courses and then have access to ambulances during emergencies. If the government wants to charge top dollar for services, it needs to be very sure that each and every person receives a fair go and equal access to these services.

The Premier stated in a media release on 18 February 2003 that 412,000 families who previously paid \$98 per year under the subscription scheme will save significantly under the ambulance levy. With this latest increase to the levy, there is now only a difference of \$7.80 between the two fees. What the Premier did not say is that many families are paying the ambulance levy more than once and many rural communities are not receiving the appropriate services as they do in metropolitan areas.

As the minister stated before, in the township of Jericho the residents have St Luke's Nursing Service—a bush nurse based ambulance service—four days a week. This means one staff member is required to provide an ambulance service as well as other health related work. For the remainder of the week the Jericho residents have to rely on the service from Alpha—also a hospital based service.

Mr Cummins: They have one job a month. Do you think one job a month justifies a full-time paramedic?

Mr KNUTH: I am happy the minister said that. He can tell them that. The service from Alpha covers an area in excess of 20,000 kilometres. Residents in Jericho shire pay an ambulance levy and some pay three or four times over. I would like to bring the minister's attention to the fact that these residents should be entitled to a full-time ambulance service. On the days when there is no-one on call to man the Jericho ambulance, it sits there, because the government is too miserable to provide the town with full-time ambulance staff.

Mr Cummins: Because there are no jobs.

Mr KNUTH: There are plenty of jobs there. The use of hospital staff to provide an ambulance service is a huge burden on that staff. Unless the government can ensure smaller towns in rural and remote Queensland have access to a 24-hour ambulance service, it has no right to charge people three to four times over, nor does it have the right to inflict an increase on those people. I support the disallowance motion.