



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

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PUBLIC HOSPITAL SYSTEM

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.06 pm): 'Big Bill' Ludwig was right when he said that Premier Beattie got it wrong with regard to proposing to abolish the free public health system. How dare a Labor Premier of this state put on the table a proposal to remove free access to our public hospital system? What we see is a government that does not understand the fundamental right of access by Queenslanders to our free public hospital system—a system that is based on clinical access, not on whether people roll up with their tax return or whether someone is a casual worker and has to prove their income in order to access the free public hospital system. It is something that is going to be not just a thorn in the government's side; it is going to be a knife at its neck because people will not wear a government that was so incompetent that it broke the once proud public health system which has been a hallmark of health services in Queensland. Our public health system, which has been proudly upheld, is a system that has been supported by doctors, nurses, the public and people from across the political spectrum.

Today we have the big leader of the union movement saying that Premier Beattie got it wrong, yet the Labor members of this House are still willing to vote with the government to keep this proposal on the table. They refuse to understand that this is not only undermining our health system; it is also undermining the confidence of the public in the ability of this government to really understand what is wrong with the delivery of health services in this state.

Never have we seen so much money in the coffers of government. As a growth tax, the GST alone is delivering at least an additional \$700 million this year. Never have we seen so much money, but still this government wants to break the health system in Queensland and make people prove their income in order to have access to it. One day it will be elective surgery; the next day it will be the emergency departments. Where does it stop? That is the heart of a real Labor government—tell people one thing and do another.

We saw it with the aged care policy, with the flogging off of aged care beds. This state government said that it was not its policy to do that, and then it went ahead and did it. The government says that it is going to have aged care beds evaluated by a health economist. However, we know that it passed a cabinet submission in 1998 regarding that policy. It proceeded to do it with Hervey Bay and now it is moving on with Yeppoon and, hey-presto, the rest of the state is on the plate and being considered as well in regard to public aged care beds. That is why I just do not believe the government when it says that it is going to get it right with regard to access to the hospital system.