



Speech by

Hon. Nita Cunningham

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Tuesday, 22 November 2005

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL; HEALTH PRACTITIONERS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (5.37 pm): I rise to support the health bills before the House. These amendments will allow early implementation of some of the recommendations from the Queensland Health systems review and will lay a strong foundation for the rest of the reforms recommended by the Forster report. The amendments will base decision making closer to the service delivery level and give districts greater responsibility to plan, manage and deliver the health services that are expected by the local residents.

The bills provides for the appointment of general managers for three health service areas and set out their functions as recommended by the Forster report. This report also noted the importance of early recruitment for these positions so that the reforms driven by each region can commence. So it is indeed important that the bills are before the House today for debate. It is also good to see that recruitment of the proposed 1,200 new doctors, nurses and allied health workers has started so well, with Bundaberg being a big winner with the appointment of our new Director of Medicine, Dr Beresford, who is already on staff and making a real difference.

The changes in the Health Practitioners Legislation Amendment Bill will also be welcome in Bundaberg. Recently, one of our private surgeries was having great difficulty replacing a longstanding Bundaberg doctor who was retiring. It has been very hard for them to find a new, Australian trained doctor because, as we are all well aware, of the shortage. Their efforts to gain an overseas trained doctor were being frustrated because Bundaberg was no longer considered an area of need, even though the surgery was only trying to maintain its doctor numbers, not trying to increase those numbers.

The Bundaberg Hospital Commission of Inquiry clearly identified concerns with the criteria. The changes contained in the bills are in line with inquiry recommendations. These bills are as a result of the findings of the Forster and Morris-Davies inquiries and will, indeed, allow this government to usher in, in a positive way, a new era of public health care in Queensland.

I spent some time with the Forster inquiry outlining the hospital complaints that I have dealt with for seven and a half years. I hope that my input helped to formulate a positive way forward. I am delighted to be able to place on record in this House that I was not called to give evidence before the Morris inquiry. Clearly, no evidence was given under oath that I had any prior knowledge of complaints against Dr Patel. If any such evidence had been given to that inquiry, I would have been called to give evidence. It is very easy to stand in this House and, under privilege, make allegations. It is an entirely different thing to front up to an inquiry and give that evidence under oath. That did not happen. I am delighted that I was not called and I am delighted to place that on the record in this House.

The people of Bundaberg and, I believe, the people of Queensland have heard all of the complaints, tragedies, derogatory remarks, name calling and blame games that have been surfacing almost daily for some six months and they do not want to hear any more. They want something done to overcome the problems and they want the system fixed. That is what this bill does. It sets a strong foundation for doing

things differently and it clearly shows this government's commitment to rebuilding community confidence in Queensland's public health system.

Following on from the last speaker, I would also like to draw the attention of the opposition to Hedley Thomas' words in the *Courier-Mail*.

There comes a time when even the Opposition should admit enough is enough. A time to stop scoring political points at the expense of Queensland's health system and start joining in a constructive process to restore the faith of staff and the general public.

I commend these bills to the House.