



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B)

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.11 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee B and also to put on record my appreciation of the staff of the committee and the chairman for the organisation and running of that hearing. Health is one of those issues that is intrinsic to people's quality of life. There are a lot of concerns in my electorate in relation to the services that are available at the Gladstone Hospital, not about those who work there—they do a tremendous job—but the pressures they work under and the small staff. I note with keenness the comments of the member for Hervey Bay that that hospital has had 22 new doctors this year. I would hope that some similar effort could be applied to the Gladstone district to see extra staff employed to alleviate the working pressure not only for doctors but for the nursing staff as well. As I said, they do a brilliant job, but they are under a lot of pressure.

For quite a number of years there has been talk about a review of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Indeed, the current health minister has advised me that it is under review. It has been very difficult to get something definitive in terms of where that review is at and what information is being considered. We hear a lot about—and we all experience the increase in—petrol prices. The PTTS takes a one-size-fits-all approach in that it does not distinguish between chronic patients and patients with a shorter-term illness. Those chronic patients face quite significant costs to travel over a period of 12 months. I would be most interested in where that PTTS review is at.

In my electorate there are no renal services. The closest services are provided in Rockhampton. I would like to mention a renal patient who passed away because of a complicated set of circumstances, Peter Savage. Peter was a diabetic. He was a bilateral amputee because of the diabetes and was also on dialysis. His funeral was last Saturday. They moved to Rockhampton to be closer to the dialysing process. He will be sadly missed, particularly by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. His case demonstrates very much the pressure that is placed on families when they have to travel three to four times a week to Rockhampton for dialysis.

On a happier note, I would like to talk about the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. It is very easy to criticise hospital services. However, I had occasion to know somebody who was a patient of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. She was not sick; she was having a baby. She could not speak highly enough of the services and support they received at that hospital. I put that on the record as a positive note.

Child safety is an area that concerns each and every one of us in this chamber. Concerns will always be held when children at risk are accommodated in motels. This relates to a significant number of young people. I am not saying that it is not an option that should be used, because when there are no other options it is safer for the children to be there. Certainly, children younger than the teenage years must be accommodated with a carer or supervisor. It was unclear during questioning at the estimates committee whether that was always the case.

The workload of the Department of Child Safety staff continues to be onerous. I commend the staff in my electorate. They do not have an easy job. I do not think there is a more difficult portfolio to work in

than Child Safety in terms of seeing the human damage caused by adults—and younger people as well—to young children. Their job is an unenviable one. I commend the staff. However, I continue to be concerned about the backlog of notifications that have to be investigated. Those are 4,000 children who are at risk of continued harm or at risk of further trauma. That backlog needs to be reduced. Finding the resources is a challenge, but we always need to remember that these little children are dependent on us as adults to ensure their future safety where their own primary carers cannot or will not. In a lot of instances the people whose children are at risk are themselves in need of support and counselling. Whilst that is not a responsibility of the Department of Child Safety, it is certainly a responsibility on us as a community to provide that nurture and support when the hand of help is extended.