



Speech by

Mark McArdle

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Hansard Thursday, 12 October 2006

YEPPOON HOSPITAL SITE ACQUISITION BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (3.47 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Yeppoon Hospital Site Acquisition Bill. At the outset, I say that not one member of this House does not wish to see the new Yeppoon Hospital built. There is no question about that. The coalition is fully supportive of that. But two major questions need to be answered today. The first is why the government has seen fit to gag debate on an issue that clearly is not urgent. We are back in this House in a matter of 2½ weeks. Under the parliamentary rules, a period of 13 days is required before this legislation can be debated. There is nothing urgent to warrant—

Mr SHINE: I rise to a point of order. The debate relating to the urgency of the bill was held this morning. That debate is over. We are now restricted to considering the contents of this bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jones): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr McARDLE: As I was saying, the issue of the gag of the debate of this bill still looms very large in this House. This bill should not be before this House for debate today. There is absolutely no reason that this parliament should be dragged through a process of 2½ hours to decide a man's livelihood because this government believes that it can ride roughshod over everybody and anything that it so desires.

The second question is: why have this man's rights been taken away from him by a government that claims on a daily basis to be looking after the individual? The Labor Party claims to be full of civil libertarians and that it stands up for the rights of the underdog, the downtrodden, the worker and the people who need support. We should see many members opposite crossing the floor very soon, because here is an individual who has had his rights taken away by a Labor government—a Labor government that claims it is there to defend the rights of the individual against all and sundry. I bet not one of those members opposite will have the guts to stand up and cross the floor, because they are too scared of what may happen to them in the event that they do. We saw that happen with the member for Noosa. She had the guts to stand up and the Labor government turfed her out. It turfed its own people out. So when the members opposite stand in this House and claim that they are looking after the individual, they had better think again, because it is a pile of rubbish and they know it.

This is a chance for the members opposite to stand up and make themselves heard. The new members opposite, when delivering their first speeches, proclaimed that they were going to assist individuals in their electorates. They were going to make certain that their electorates came first. They were going to abide by the needs of the society in which they live. Here is their chance. They should come over to the coalition side of the House and vote against this individual's rights being removed by a government that is arrogant, tired and pathetic and does not care about the individual at all.

I certainly endorse the comments of the member for Darling Downs. He gave a great speech. He outlined very clearly the battle that one man has taken on—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr McARDLE: That is exactly right. The members opposite should hold up their hands. One man has taken on this battle and the Labor government has taken this matter to parliament to beat him down.

We heard the incoherent ramblings of the member for Rockhampton trying to establish the basis upon which this bill should be before the House.

I turn to the facts of this matter and the independent decision made by the Acquisitions and Tenures Services Unit of the Department of Natural Resources and Water. The minister's own department ruled very clearly that this land is no better than the other land owned by Mr O'Brien. Mr O'Brien offered to the state government a larger block of land located about 500 metres away. One has to wonder what is going on in the back rooms. Why are we rushing through this legislation? The conclusion of the decision states—

On balance I can find very little difference in the physicality between the two sites. I do accept Queensland Health's need in the public interest for a new hospital in the Yeppoon area. I do accept that the Hoskyn Drive site would be a suitable site for the relocation of the Yeppoon Hospital, however so would the Erskine Court site. I do not believe that for the sake of 500 metres the community interests of the people of Yeppoon should be disadvantaged by the loss of the commercial development of the Hoskyn Drive Site.

Maybe the signs showing the Premier's face would be 500 metres away if the government took the second site as opposed to the first site on the major highway. What is wrong with the independent determiner coming to that conclusion? Why does the government not accept that individual's determination? Why does it not take up Mr O'Brien's offer to purchase the second site because, clearly, the sites are compatible. In fact, the minister in his second reading speech made the following point—

This site provides good visual and physical access from the Yeppoon-Rockhampton Road. It is important that a hospital have a prominent location, easily found by the public and visitors.

I would ask the minister in his reply to point out to this parliament where Mr Gardiner is wrong. He has gone through an exhaustive process of listening, reading and looking at documentation to come to his determination. So the minister certainly owes Mr O'Brien and this parliament an explanation as to why Mr Gardiner is wrong, and we will be keen to hear that in his reply.

It almost seems that when this government does not like the umpire's decision it changes the rules to suit itself. This is not the first time this has occurred. In fact, when this government feels that things are not going its own way it simply tries to shift the issue to somewhere else or tries to find some other reason it should achieve its own goals by getting the umpire's decision overturned. Again, this bill before the House is simply one more example of the government's attempt to usurp the rights of Mr O'Brien.

I also ask the minister to address in his reply the fact that Mr O'Brien's rights are being trampled by the process the minister has put in place by bringing this bill before the House today and then gagging debate. Mr Gardiner states—

In terms of location and catchment, both parcels are within 2 kilometres of the centre of Yeppoon and the difference in their location from the Rockhampton-Yeppoon Road by constructed or to be constructed roads would be less than 500 metres.

He then says—

Therefore in my opinion the location of the site a further 500 metres down the road is not a major issue.

Could the minister address that point? Could he explain why, even though Mr Gardiner states that 500 metres is not an issue, he proclaims or believes that it is an issue and again point out where Mr Gardiner is wrong in his determination? I think Mr O'Brien would be acutely keen to hear from the minister why Mr Gardiner is wrong in his determination and also to hear an explanation of where Mr O'Brien is wrong in entering into negotiations with the state government. The minister made the comment that negotiations have been underway for a period of 12 months now. So what? It is an individual's right to negotiate a fair price for his or her land. There is nothing wrong with that. Would the minister indicate in his reply whether he sees anything wrong with that process? What has Mr O'Brien done wrong except to demand that his rights are protected, demand that his entitlements are adhered to and demand that his right to negotiate is equally paramount to the right of the government to acquire the land?

As I said, this issue comes down to one thing: this government is taking away someone's rights because it does not like the umpire's determination. It is as simple as that. It is not going to respect the rights of Mr O'Brien. It is not going to adhere to the procedures and processes put in place to deal with this issue. What the government is going to do is take Mr O'Brien by the scruff of the neck and deal with him as though he were a noncitizen. If that is the way this Labor government is going to conduct itself on day 2 of the 52nd Parliament of this state, the people of Queensland are in for one hell of a ride. If this is the start of the process of the ramshackle and, in my opinion, pathetic attempt to protect the rights of individuals, we are in serious trouble in this state.