



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 15 February 2006

HEALTH SYSTEM

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (5.47 pm): I move—

That all parts after 'parliament' are deleted and the following parts inserted:

1. notes the significant pressures on all health systems in Australia in terms of increasing demand brought about by an increasing and ageing population;
2. notes the significant shortages of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals in Australia to meet these increasing demands;
3. notes the Beattie government's response to these demands by:
 - injecting \$6.4 billion in new funding for Queensland's health system;
 - the initiatives to recruit doctors, nurses and allied health professions from interstate and overseas;
 - the significant increases in salaries paid to doctors working in Queensland Health to ensure Queensland retains its existing workforce and attracts new doctors from interstate and overseas;
 - today's announcement to open 66 new beds as an immediate response to relieve access block at a number of major public hospitals throughout Queensland with another 170 to be opened by mid-2007;
4. notes the positive results gained by Queensland from the Council of Australian Governments meeting which is outlined in the communiqué tabled by the Premier this morning; and
5. expresses its support of the Premier's commitment to make responding to these health challenges the No. 1 priority of the Beattie government.

It is typical of the opposition to ask us to do something that it could not achieve when it was in power. Let us hear some truth and look at its record. The total number of patients waiting longer than acceptable in categories 1,2 and 3 had blown out from 7,344 in 1996, when the opposition came to power, to 8,577 by February 1998. On the coalition government's first set of waiting list figures in 1996, 32 per cent of the 23,208 patients in all three categories had waited too long. By February 1998, that had blown out to 35 per cent of 24,755. Worse was the way in which category 2 patients—that is, semiurgent patients—had to wait. In 1988, as the opposition we released figures that showed that on 1 January 1997, 38.5 per cent of category 2 patients had waited too long. By December 1997, that had blown out to 40.5 per cent. Based on what we have put forward, we look like angels compared to that incompetence. Basically, not only are they incompetent in opposition but they were also incompetent in government. They should not talk to us about track records.

I shall table two things. The first is the waiting times for category 1 surgery, their targets and a cabinet document which we obtained in opposition that sets out the figures that I have just released. I table those for the benefit of the House. Let us have no more incompetent nonsense from those opposite. This document shows that when the opposition was in government its waiting lists were almost twice as bad as ours are at the moment, notwithstanding the difficulties that we have had. That is why they are not fit for government and that is why they should never be allowed back into government. We do have problems in health and, if members opposite come back into government, those problems will be twice as bad. That is the evidence and the figures are very clear.

Opposition members: Ha, ha!

Mr BEATTIE: They may laugh, but their cabinet document confirms it. Both members opposite were in that cabinet. The Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the National Party were responsible for waiting times where 40.5 per cent of patients waited too long. I assure those gentlemen opposite that they will be hearing more of that statistic over the next few weeks and months.

Let us move on. It is no wonder Mr Springborg and Mr Quinn were part of a cabinet decision to hide these figures from freedom of information legislation. What target did the coalition set for itself in category 2? Not five per cent, not 10 per cent, not 20 per cent. It decided a realistic target for treating semiurgent category 2 patients on time, that is within 90 days, was 40 per cent. The member opposite has no credibility on waiting lists—absolutely none.

Ms Bligh: Four times.

Mr BEATTIE: Four times. In other words, the coalition was prepared to tolerate four out of every 10 patients waiting for more than three months for operations that they should have had in less than 90 days. That is the opposition's track record. Forget about the rhetoric and the hot air; that is what it did in government. Talk about incompetent! It was the worst handler of health that this state has ever seen.

This policy was published in the State Social Development Strategy in February 1998. For seven years my government has done better than that and will do better in the future. For the whole seven and half years that we have been in government we did better than that. The incompetent rabble opposite know exactly what they did when they were in government. Queensland Health has consistently produced better results under my government than it did under the coalition government. Let us talk about facts. Let us talk about the truth. That is exactly where we are.

On 22 January I announced a 10-point plan to address current issues. I can report progress on each one of these points. Firstly, the urgent establishment of the clinicians emergency department task force. This group of clinical heads of the state's emergency departments has now met three times. It is working closely with the three newly appointed area managers of Queensland Health. It is working well.

Secondly, in relation to access block solutions, \$3 million has been allocated in 2005-06. Many of our emergency department clinicians say more efficient movement of patients from emergency to ward beds or other care will improve working conditions, treatment times and outcomes for patients. Every hospital in Queensland was instructed by the director-general to investigate how many beds could be opened to assist with solving access block across Queensland's health system. Today the health minister, Stephen Robertson, announced a major breakthrough with the immediate opening of 66 beds. There will eventually be 170.

Thirdly, we are holding a direct appeal to doctors in Queensland, especially women doctors. Advertisements have been placed.

Fourthly, there is an interstate and international recruitment campaign. We are continuing with our overseas recruitment campaigns and a specialised recruitment team is assessing new applications.

Fifthly, we will publish information on staffing levels and emergency department status reports. Queensland Health will make available detailed reports on hospital staffing on a monthly basis. Its web site will also carry daily status reports. This is being done. I table for the information of the House those plans and the responses to what we are doing.