



Speech by

Peter Lawlor

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT ON HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (12.21 pm): This morning the Leader of the Liberal Party said, 'Doctors do not want to work for this mob.' Of course he was referring to the government. That is a deliberate deception presented by the Leader of the Liberal Party. I am indebted to Sue Lappeman for her article in yesterday's *Gold Coast Bulletin*. In reference to the Victorian AMA she stated—

They are warning that doctors are leaving that state in droves because Queensland and New South Wales doctors are paid 50 per cent more as a result of government initiatives to attract doctors to work in public hospitals.

The article goes on to state—

'As the chasm of conditions and pay increases, because Premiers Peter Beattie and Morris Iemma value their doctors more, we are going to find it increasingly difficult to maintain a good public hospital system in Victoria,' the spokesman said.

Of course, the opposition conveniently forgets that as it is a great disappointment to them that the Beattie government's strategy to address Queensland health issues is working. That is why this week in question time they have moved off the health issue. The flavour of the week is water. I suggest that they have water on the brain.

Mr Cummins: Give them a tap on the head.

Mr LAWLOR: That is a very good idea. A tap on the head would be very appropriate.

This morning the minister mentioned that all Australian states have a doctor, nurse and allied health worker shortage. That was also mentioned by the Premier. I assure both those gentlemen that it goes further than that. Over Christmas I went to the UK and Ireland to visit my daughters. With any paper that I picked up, if I deleted the names of the paper, the minister and the hospital I could believe that I was reading another story about a health issue in Australia. However, it was happening in Ireland or the UK. I am told that a similar situation exists in Europe. Of course, things are far worse in America. In the United States they practically die on the streets if they do not have health insurance.

The Premier mentioned getting doctors from Third World countries. What does it say about the Australian system that it cannot train sufficient doctors for our own purposes? Several months ago Dr Hambleton, the Queensland President of the AMA, said that when he graduated in 1984—and I am not certain of the exact figures, but these are fairly accurate—230 medical students graduated in Queensland. Last year there was basically the same number of graduates. After 22 years, during which I would suggest the population of Queensland has trebled, the number of graduates is essentially the same.

Unfortunately the new member for Gaven, Dr Douglas, cannot speak in this debate and I certainly do not want to speak on his behalf. I can assure members that he, too, is having difficulty finding people to fill his position.

Last year this government released the health action plan, which set a target of recruiting an extra 300 doctors, 500 nurses and 400 allied health professionals in the 18 months to December this year. We are on the road to achieving those targets. We have an extra 236 doctors on the Queensland Health payroll. That leads me back to the distortion presented by the opposition about 800 Queensland Health workers leaving their jobs. The fact of the matter is that they go through that process each and every year.

They go through the training internship and so on, and they go into private practice and other places. They go overseas, just as Dr Flegg and Dr Douglas did. That is what happens. That is a normal process.

Of course, at every opportunity the member for Moggill conveniently neglects to mention that the current number of doctors has increased from 4,552 to 4,788, which is an increase of 236. Apparently he wants to circumvent the COAG process. There is a COAG agreement requesting funding for 955 extra medical places and 6,430 extra places for nurses. Of those 955 extra medical places, 325 are required for Queensland. There is also a recruiting program for nurses. In June we had 21,911 nurses and that number has increased to 22,975, which is an extra 1,064 nurses. That program has been extremely successful. I support the motion moved by the Premier.