



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT ON HEALTH SYSTEM

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (12.27 pm): I rise to contribute to this debate on the Premier's motion. The crisis now crippling the provision of health services has been coming for decades. In *Hansard* there are warnings in debates in this House going back almost 20 years, especially in relation to the lack of doctors and other medical specialists in rural and regional areas. There is no doubt that the Productivity Commission was correct in finding that the federal government is responsible for funding university based education and training places for health workers. Instead of funding additional training places, it has deliberately chosen to sit back and let health services collapse.

As we all know, it takes many years to train a doctor. It takes upwards of a decade to train a doctor to a level where they are able to work in a hospital. With warnings stretching back into the 1980s, there has been more than enough time to get extra places into our universities. There has been more than enough time to train young Australians and Queenslanders to meet this need.

Senior COAG officials have identified that nationally we need 955 extra medical places and some 6,430 extra nurse training places. What do we get from those in the pampered halls of federal power? A promise of less than half the necessary number of doctor places and less than one-sixth the necessary nurse numbers. That is a total betrayal of every Australian and Queenslander on hospital waiting lists and a total betrayal of every Australian and Queenslander in a regional or rural area who has to travel hundreds or even thousands of kilometres for medical attention. It is a total betrayal of mothers who are forced to give birth on the side of the road as they struggle to reach a distant maternity ward in time. They stand condemned for their arrogant disregard of the people of this nation in failing to ensure enough doctors and nurses are trained right here in Queensland.

However, the health crisis is a complex issue. While the federal government has failed to train enough health workers, there is also a large measure of fault at the state level. After all, the state government is responsible for our public hospital system. It is the state government—and for most of the past two decades in Queensland that has meant an ALP government—that manages that vital service. It is the state that is solely responsible for having created a work environment so bad that hundreds and hundreds of doctors and nurses have left year after year. Surely, as obvious as the need to train more doctors might have been, so, too, was it blindingly obviously that we needed to keep those doctors and nurses that we were lucky enough to already have.

It was entirely the responsibility of this state government. We all heard ad nauseam, after the Patel debacle, about how this government would inject a massive amount of funding into Queensland Health. Over and over again, we heard how this ALP government would fund an extra 236 training places for doctors over five years—off its own bat. Over and over again, we heard how Queensland Health would be significantly restructured. Over and over again, we have heard how doctors' wages have been increased.

We did not hear how all of this became necessary only because of decades of neglect by this same government. We did not hear how, under the stewardship of this government, in only 10 years half the maternity wards across Queensland have closed down. We did not hear any explanation for the years of empty promises that were shovelled out to us that everything was okay in Queensland Health. We have

heard nothing to convince us that we should suddenly trust the assurances of the same government that insisted for years that our public hospital system was just fine, thank you very much.

Much more needs to be done. This motion recognises that responsibility for creating university places lies with an uncaring federal coalition but that, significantly, the other part lies with this ALP state government. They all need to get real.

In Queensland, doctors' wages have recently increased. However, we need to consider the signing of contracts that are longer than 12 months. That is simply not long enough.

The university trained nurse program is not giving us nurses who stay in the system. We need to revisit the hands-on, practical training that gave us generations of dedicated and skilled carers. We need to ensure that nurses in areas such as aged care facilities, prisons and so on are not left behind. We need to realise that the health of our constituents is the first and primary responsibility of every level of government.

When it comes to health, both federal and state governments desperately need to do only one thing—stop the politics and just get real.