



Speech by

Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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MEDICAL POSITIONS

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (6.16 pm): People are sick and tired of the political games that are daily played out in health, the latest irresponsible act being the take-over of the Mersey Hospital in Tasmania by the Howard federal government. We need bipartisan support on health, but any attempt by Premier Peter Beattie and the Minister for Health to get the politics out of health in Queensland have been rejected outright by the coalition parties.

Let us go back to April 2006. The Premier moved a motion in this House seeking bipartisan support. He called on the federal government to fund 325 more medical training places at universities in Queensland. The Productivity Commission had recognised the shortage and the federal government's failure on this, but did members opposite support the call? The member for Moggill voted no to the call for an extra 325 medical training places. How did the member for Callide vote? He voted no. To her credit, the member for Tablelands, in the spirit of bipartisanship, voted with the government. Again the motion that she moved tonight shows that we have more in common than not, but she cannot let the federal government off the hook again. We cannot continue to fill the gaps that the federal government is leaving wide open in health care in Australia.

In Queensland many high-achieving students have had their hopes of a medical career dashed because of federally imposed limits on medical places. Way back in April 2006 members opposite had their chance to help our local aspiring medical students, but they mercilessly played politics and failed to support our bid. At that time, the Beattie government campaigned successfully to force the Howard government to increase medical student places at universities to overcome the national doctor shortage—a shortage of Mr Howard's own making.

There are stark differences between our state Labor government and its management of health services and that of the Howard government. The Beattie Labor government is spending substantially more funds on health. The federal government is intent on cutting funds to the states. The Beattie government has also taken the unprecedented step of allocating our own state funding to create new medical training places. Before it increased training places the federal government had to be embarrassed into action through pressure from state Labor governments applied at the COAG table.

Thirty-five state-funded medical scholarship holders now have a bright future ahead of them because of the Beattie government's initiatives. We have invested \$60 million to fund 235 medical places at Griffith University. Tonight I take this opportunity to congratulate Griffith University for the wonderful world-class medical school that it is developing on the Gold Coast.

In fact, Queensland's four medical schools this year have increased their number of training places. This has come about not because of a strong call from the coalition members, because we know they voted against the extra 325 training places for Queensland medical students. It has come about because of, among many other things, strong lobbying from state Labor governments.

On the issue of federal-state funding, funding public health services used to be a 50-50 split between the states and the Commonwealth.

Ms Jones: The good old days!

Ms STRUTHERS: That was in the good old days. I will take that interjection. They were the good old days of federal Labor governments—and they will be back. In another few months they will be back. Mr Howard reneged on that deal, dudding public hospitals in Queensland. In his stuck-in-the-past approach John Howard favoured the old 60-40 dance routine. That is Mr Howard's step. That is his favourite dance routine. For every dollar now going into public health services in Queensland the Beattie government invests about 65c to the federal government's 35c. The member for Tablelands needs to understand that Mr Howard robbed her Cairns district of \$150 million. Members in Brisbane know that our public hospitals are more than \$1 billion out of pocket because of this funding arrangement.

Not only do we need to take urgent and ongoing steps to increase the supply of doctors, nurses and allied health practitioners; we need to manage demand on the system. For example, every single day our public hospitals are forced to care for around 468 patients who should not be there. They are waiting on a nursing home placement, but again the federal government has let the responsibility fall to the states. The federal government should be opening up far more nursing home places. I am pleased to see Kevin Rudd's commitment to the additional 2,000 places.

Queenslanders have a state Labor government that is injecting record funds into health, recruiting and training more health practitioners than ever. We have a capable minister who can stand proud in this House because of his efforts. He has a capable leadership team and over 60,000 staff across Queensland Health who are committed to their jobs. We now need a Prime Minister who will face up to his responsibilities. Bring on the federal election. Bring on a bipartisan approach to health care in Australia. Bring on a Rudd Labor government and let us get this country well again.