



Speech by

## Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard Wednesday, 17 October 2007

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### MOTION: HEALTH SYSTEM

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algester—ALP) (5.49 pm): I second the amendment moved by the minister. Members opposite are always quick to criticise the health system in Queensland. In doing so, they are criticising the efforts of hardworking nurses, doctors, allied health workers and administrative staff. In doing so, they are saying that the dedicated efforts of these people are not good enough. These clinicians, health workers and administrative staff are working hard to implement the government's \$10 billion Health Action Plan. These clinicians and others are providing quality care to make people well and free of pain. Each time the members opposite criticise and undermine the health system they are having a go at these hardworking people. They are undermining confidence in the system, knowing that the last thing sick people need is to feel more anxious about their care. Their constant undermining and fearmongering is totally irresponsible.

What is their alternative to the Bligh government's comprehensive \$10 billion Health Action Plan? They have a flawed policy. They are yes-men to John Howard in his policy to employ more bureaucrats on hospital boards—a policy that will not deliver one more doctor or one more nurse to our hospitals. My challenge to the opposition is to provide bipartisan support to the major health capital works program underway in Queensland—provide bipartisan support for the statewide efforts to recruit and maintain quality staff in Queensland. My challenge is to value the 60,000-plus Queensland Health workforce, and let them get on with their dedicated efforts without the daily politicking.

The member for Surfers Paradise hides behind his constant media releases and privilege speeches in this House. I put another challenge to him. If the member for Surfers Paradise seriously believes that the John Howard back-to-the-future hospital board policy is best, come along to the statewide meeting of the new chairs of the community health councils next week here at Parliament House. Come along and tell them that you want to sack them and go back to the past with an outdated model. Have the guts to come and front them. Tell them why you want to do that. It was proven to be grossly inadequate. It was a model where boards racked up substantial debts. Come along and tell these people that they are not local people who are having a say in the running of the health system. I bet they disagree with him. I challenge him to come out to the QEII hospital in my local area and tell the staff there that his health policy does not provide them with a new elective surgery centre but simply will scrap their new health council.

My challenge to the member for Surfers Paradise is to acknowledge that there is a massive population growth right now. Work with us in solving these problems. Stop the constant criticising and politicking. To put it bluntly, we are getting older and sicker. If that was not tough enough, we have a national shortage of doctors and nurses brought on largely by the Howard government's failure to train more clinicians.

**Mrs Stuckey** interjected.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Our emergency departments treated over 880,000 people last year, which is a five per cent increase on the year before.

**Mrs Stuckey** interjected.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** With very few exceptions, these people received world-class care. Between April and June this year, Queensland Health also treated over 28,000 people on the elective surgery waitlist.

**Mrs Stuckey** interjected.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, that is over 1,000 more people than last year.

**Mrs Stuckey** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Currumbin, you are constantly and incessantly interjecting. You are up on your feet shortly and I would ask you to desist.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** We are recruiting record numbers of doctors and nurses into our hospitals which is resulting in quicker treatment. Put simply, we have a comprehensive plan to get as many people as possible off the waiting lists. Let us consider what happened 10 years ago under the coalition when it was managing our health system. More than 40 per cent of patients needing semiurgent surgery—category 2 people—were waiting longer than medically recommended. We have now driven this down to around 25 per cent.

Specialist outpatient services are also a priority area of this government. Last financial year alone more than 3½ million Queenslanders were seen and treated—a 7.2 per cent increase on the previous year. There is a lot happening in our system. Our Health Action Plan is about doing things better and smarter. Australia had a proud tradition of a fifty-fifty funding agreement. That was until John Howard came along. Under John Howard, Queensland is coughing up 65 per cent of healthcare funding and the Commonwealth only 35 per cent. Kevin Rudd wants to end the blame game. He clearly has announced a comprehensive plan to work cooperatively with the states. The Rudd government will invest locally in my area with a \$7½ million GP superclinic, and many more of these will be set up around the nation. That is what we need: new ideas and new leadership. I know who I am voting for on 24 November, and it is not Mr Howard.