



Speech by

Hon. Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

Hon. N ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (5.45 pm): I move the following amendment—

That all words after “House” are deleted and the following words inserted:

Notes—

- the failure of the previous voluntary subscription scheme to provide an adequate level of funding for the Queensland Ambulance Service;
- that the Community Ambulance Cover levy has provided the QAS with a stable and secure funding base;
- that since 1998, this Government has more than doubled the budget to the QAS, to a record \$404.4 million this financial year including the recruitment of an additional 250 ambulance officers; and
- commends the professionalism of Queensland’s ambulance officers in the service they provide to Queenslanders.

In moving this amendment, I assure Queenslanders that the Queensland Ambulance Service is delivering a world-class service to the people of Queensland. In recent months the opposition has consistently peddled misinformation about the Queensland Ambulance Service in an attempt to undermine the confidence Queenslanders have in the service. One particular piece of misinformation is that the money raised by the community ambulance cover is making no difference to the quality of service being provided, and that is simply not borne out by the facts.

Since the CAC was introduced in 2003, the Queensland Ambulance Service has recruited an additional 503 ambulance officers, commissioned an additional 194 ambulances, completed 33 new or refurbished stations and purchased nearly 650 defibrillators. As members would be aware, the community ambulance cover levy was introduced in 2003 to deliver a secure and stable funding base for the Ambulance Service. It replaced a failing subscription scheme which was no longer meeting the costs of providing an ambulance service to subscribers.

The Beattie government has maintained and actually increased funding to the Queensland Ambulance Service every year since the CAC levy was introduced. For example, between 2003-04—which is the first year of the levy—and this financial year the amount collected by the community ambulance cover levy increased by \$21 million but the total ambulance budget was increased by over \$128 million. This is clear evidence that the government is increasing expenditure on the Ambulance Service far in excess of that collected by the levy.

This year’s record budget of \$404.4 million includes the biggest ever staff increase in one year in the Ambulance Service’s history—250 ambulance officers on top of the 220 ambulance officers recruited last financial year. As well as that, we are commissioning over 140 new ambulances, of which 30 to 40 will be additional vehicles on the road. We are building three new ambulance stations and 17 redeveloped or replacement stations, and delivering around 135 new defibrillators.

The last coalition Ambulance Service budget was \$158 million. This year’s Beattie government budget is more than double that, at \$404.4 million. The record speaks for itself. The opposition has claimed that stations are regularly closed at night and that three stations were closed in Brisbane last weekend, and that is simply incorrect. Contingency plans ensure that front-line ambulance services are maintained at

all times. In fact, last Saturday night there were four more crews rostered on duty in Brisbane than is normally the case. One crew from Petrie station was relocated to Deception Bay to cover an unfilled shift, and crews from surrounding stations were deployed to maintain coverage in Petrie. Crews were also allocated to cover sick leave replacement shifts at Grovely and Chermside, and they were out on the road on Saturday night as would be expected.

It is important to remember that the Queensland Ambulance Service is a mobile service. Paramedics in vehicles deliver ambulance services not ambulance stations. The opposition claims that paramedics are leaving in droves. That is incorrect again. During the 2006 calendar year the separation rate for the Queensland Ambulance Service was 3.92 per cent, significantly less than the whole-of-government separation rate of 6.11 per cent. The opposition also claims that staff are being asked to work up to 20 hours straight. That is an allegation that has been shown to be incorrect on a number of occasions.

But it does highlight the inconsistency of those opposite. On the one hand the opposition claims that officers are working too long but on the other hand they continue to argue for 14-hour rostered shifts. Under roster reform the maximum rostered shift is now 10 hours which provides a safer and healthier outcome for paramedics and enables resources to be matched to areas of high demand.

Roster reform will also complement the introduction of an average 38-hour week from October this year. One significant benefit to ambulance officers is that that will enable them to access up to nine weeks leave a year which is made up of both annual leave and accrued time off. There is no doubt that the Queensland Ambulance Service is facing increased demand for services and our ambulance officers are doing an outstanding job in meeting that increased demand. For example, in the 2006-07 financial year the service attended 10,757 more code 1 incidents in under 10 minutes than in the 2005-06 financial year. That is why the government is providing the resources and funding needed for ambulance officers to get on with the job.