



Speech by

# Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard Wednesday, 17 October 2007

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## MOTION: HEALTH SYSTEM

**Hon. RJ WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (5.44 pm): Our government is rightly proud of its reform revolution to improve the health system of our state for all Queenslanders. Like health systems the world over, Queensland's health system faces enormous challenges into the future to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population. Our hospitals are already busier than ever before and treating more patients than ever before. That is why we are providing them with the staff and resources to meet the ever-increasing public demand for health services.

I am sorry, Mr Speaker. I move the following amendment—

That all words after "notes" are deleted and the following words inserted:

"the success of the Queensland government in improving our health system for Queenslanders through the \$10 billion Health Action Plan which is delivering:

- more clinical staff;
- a new and improved health infrastructure;
- a safer and more accountable health system for patients;
- more hospital beds and quality care for more patients than ever before".

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I note that the amendment has been moved by the minister.

**Mr WELFORD:** I will try again. Our government is rightly proud of its reform revolution to improve the health system for all Queenslanders.

**Mr Seeney:** There's no need to start again. You've done that bit.

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes, there is. You want to hear it. You need to hear it.

**Mr Seeney:** You have done that bit.

**Mr WELFORD:** Our hospitals are already busier than ever before and treating more patients than ever before.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr WELFORD:** They need to know this. That is why we are providing our hospitals with the staff and resources to meet the ever-increasing public demand for health services.

We have made good progress to date, but there is a lot more work to be done. Next week marks the second anniversary of our government's landmark \$10 billion Health Action Plan. Although it is a five-year blueprint for a better health system, we are already seeing real reform, real improvements and real benefits just two years on. As the Premier said earlier today, we are building a first-class health system that is more responsive to challenges, more flexible, more accountable, more patient focused and better resourced to deal with increasing demand.

For example, Queensland Health's budget this year is a massive \$7.15 billion—\$770 million more than last year and more than double the health budget of 10 years ago when it was \$3.4 billion in 1997-98. Queensland Health now employs 6,000 more clinicians than it did in June 2005, just two years ago. That is 1,073 more doctors, 3,801 more nurses and 1,228 more allied health professionals.

Speaking of nurses, I was heartened by today's announcement by federal Labor to invest in more new nursing graduates and attract trained nurses back into the hospital system. A Rudd Labor government will aim to put 9,250 extra nurses into Australia's hospital system in a new \$81 million commitment. This will be a welcome investment and is in stark comparison to the neglect by the current Howard government for so many years. This investment will build upon our government's investment to increase our nursing workforce.

The Bligh government is also investing \$3 billion to build new tertiary hospitals on the Gold and Sunshine coasts, plus a new Queensland children's hospital. We are also building new and upgraded hospital emergency departments across Queensland, from the Gold Coast to Thursday Island. We have already opened hundreds more beds. And we are funding projects that will open more than 2,500 additional hospital beds between 2006 and 2016 at a cost of \$3.6 billion.

We are also building a safer and more transparent health system. We have established a fiercely independent watchdog—the Health Quality and Complaints Commission—to monitor standards in health services and investigate complaints with a lot more powers and more resources than its predecessor. We have established a new Office of the Medical Board to tighten the assessment processes for the registration of doctors—indeed, Queensland has amongst the most strict registration requirements of any state in Australia. We now have an unprecedented level of public reporting of hospital performance.

Our system of course is not just about hospitals. We are also investing a record \$528.8 million to improve mental health services, and we are improving statewide community health services to address chronic diseases, improve the quality of life for people with chronic diseases and reduce the level of avoidable hospital admissions. On the subject of community health services, I want to raise the opposition's fascination with local hospital boards. How could anyone efficiently coordinate and provide statewide community health services if the health system was run by individual boards—

**Mr Seeney:** It worked before.

**Mr WELFORD:** It did not work before. It never worked. That is why the system needed to be changed. It worked under an old horse and buggy system. It cannot work in a modern, highly developed, fast-growing state like Queensland. It simply would not cope. As I said, how could anyone efficiently coordinate and provide statewide community health services if the health system was run by individual boards operating in isolation with their own systems? Queensland already experimented with local hospital boards under the Bjelke-Petersen regime, and they were a disaster. In the end they were a disaster and they were underinvested in. Our government takes a more modern approach.