



Speech by

Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (2.59 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the Community Ambulance Cover and Other Acts Amendment Bill. The coalition will support the bill as it goes through the House. It is with respect to the community ambulance cover in particular that I wish to make some comments.

As members of the House would realise, this act was passed through parliament a number of years ago and at that time the coalition had some real concerns about the way in which the community ambulance cover was to be implemented. Indeed, our concerns have not been allayed and this legislation will certainly not affect the way in which the ambulance cover is collected.

Obviously we support any move that makes all possible resources available to the Queensland Ambulance Service. The paramedics and other people who work within that service do a great job for our communities. However, it must be stressed that with \$120-odd million currently flowing into that resource, one would expect that—as we were promised—we would have the best ambulance service in the world, but suddenly it seems that it is not that great after all. We see great gaps in the services provided to our communities. One has to question why that is the case when, supposedly, extra resources are flowing into the service and volunteers are raising funds for essential items of equipment to be supplied to the ambulance facilities throughout our community.

The real question is: why is the service not performing as well as we would expect? One has to question some of the decisions that have been made in recent times in terms of staffing levels, rostering and quite a lot of other issues that impact on the lives of the paramedics who work within the service.

Opposition members regularly raise issues about the number of stations throughout Brisbane that are being closed, particularly on the weekends, simply because there is not enough staff to man those stations. Regularly, paramedics within the service contact us to indicate their concerns about the amount of overtime that they are working. Basically, the 10-hour shifts have created—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Mirani, I have given you some latitude to make your general point. However, we are not debating the performance of the Queensland Ambulance Service. The bill is very specific; it is about the privatisation of the electricity industry and the impact on the collection of the CAC. I ask you to come back to the bill.

Mr MALONE: I thank you for that, Mr Deputy Speaker. My view would be that the collection of the ambulance tax is very pertinent to this legislation. Indeed, it is part of the heading of the legislation, so I would imagine that—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The mere fact that the words appear in the heading does not make it relevant. I ask you to come back to the bill.

Mr MALONE: That is very interesting and I respect your decision, Mr Deputy Speaker. The impact of the community ambulance cover has had an ongoing effect in terms of funding the Ambulance Service.

The reality is that there are some real concerns about the service. If possible, I would like to talk about the issue of the collection of the levy.

Our view has always been that the collection of that levy should be a once-only collection. In our communities, quite a number of individuals pay multiples of the tax. This legislation could have provided a great opportunity for the government to look at a different or modified way of ensuring that individuals are not charged multiples of the tax. For instance, businesspeople pay taxes on electricity accounts where they live and at their workplaces. In some cases, they may also pay the tax on a warehouse. Of course, people who have billboards on the side of the road may run multiple accounts and can pay up to 40 or 50 times. There is an inbuilt inequity in the ambulance tax that I suggest could have been looked at in this bill. Unfortunately, it was not.

The coalition's point has always been that we need to get back to a sensible and realistic way of administering this levy. The fact that I cannot speak about the impact of the levy on the Ambulance Service certainly curtails what I would like to say. Certainly the money collected has been an asset to the paramedics. Unfortunately, it would appear that the management of QAS has been able to utilise all the funds and yet not deliver the service. With those few words, I support the legislation with reservations.