



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

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## **QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (5.40 pm): I second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. This motion is about supporting the hardworking, front-line employees of the QAS. In my role as opposition spokesman, I certainly take my hat off to the people in the QAS who are working on the front line under very difficult conditions. They are doing a great job under those circumstances.

We are debating tonight the vital issue of management of our state Ambulance Service and the absolute failure of the Beattie Labor government to take its management seriously. This is because the Department of Emergency Services, more than any of the other departments, has become a plaything of the Beattie government—so much so that hardworking, front-line staff are fed up with the cronyism and the protection of ALP mates and hacks at the expense of the sound operation and management of the service.

The QAS has been plagued by problems since the Premier decided to use its services as a vote buyer to become Premier. He was the one who rushed out on the eve of the 1998 election and promised all Seniors Card holders, pensioners and their dependants free ambulance cover. Peter Beattie mindlessly scrapped our common-sense and workable subscription scheme and threw open the service to buy votes. And what happened? When he became Premier a lot of people thought, 'Let's start using this free service.' The result has been that demand has soared but Peter Beattie and his ministers sat back and did nothing to provide the resources that were necessary for an ambulance staff to meet their demand.

Peter Beattie and his ministers ignored the problems until it became overwhelmingly obvious that extra resources were desperately needed. He then hit us with an ill-conceived and totally unfair ambulance tax. Who can forget the problems the Premier caused by, without thinking, whacking a tax on every electricity meter in the state? Many electricity consumers, most in small businesses, were forced to pay two, three, four and five times—and up to 21 times that I am aware of—but the Premier did not care that the money was needed to provide us with what he promised would be the world's best ambulance service.

We have now had Peter Beattie's ambulance tax for more than four years. In that time Labor has raked in almost half a billion dollars. Everyone in Queensland has the right to ask the Premier tonight, 'What have you done with half a billion dollars?', because by any standard we do not have the world's best ambulance service, as was promised by the Premier. We have had so many problems, so many crises, so many miscalls, so many excuses that no-one believes the Premier or his ministers anymore. The problems have occurred right across the state.

Everyone has a story of failure, or staff being stretched, or calling 000 and being sent a fire engine, or major ambulance stations being closed, or promises being made and nothing being done. We have just been through the estimates hearing and it was revealed that almost \$15 million and possibly up to \$20 million was not spent by the government on new stations in its Capital Works Program. We have had promises of new stations and new equipment, but in reality the money was not spent. We have had all the promises of 140 new ambulance vehicles and then it was revealed that Queensland's main ambulance builder for 40 years has shut up shop because it could not get orders for new vehicles from the government.

Clearly the minister is not interested in listening to the staff in QAS. During the estimates process I asked the minister whether he would consult with ambulance paramedics on a one-to-one basis or even through the newly formed EMSVA group of paramedics that were putting together a small organisation to look after the welfare of their members. He indicated to me and to the committee that he would not listen to those people; that they had to direct their concerns through the union. Clearly the minister is not interested in hearing the staff's concerns. He is not interested in doing anything about the cronyism in the middle and upper management of the service. He is not interested in the sick and stress levels in the department, and he is not interested in the failing services. He is not interested in doing a thing to redress the current problems that we have in the service. Yesterday and today the questions asked in the parliament really demonstrated that the minister has no real interest in addressing the concerns we have in the Ambulance Service. We have ALP ads using Ambulance Service personnel in uniform that are running 24 hours a day, seven days a week in areas in Queensland.

Time expired.