



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (4.32 pm): I rise to add my contribution to the report from Estimates Committee B, which dealt with the services to be provided by the departments of Health, Police and Community Safety in the coming financial year. Firstly, I note the budget for the department of health has increased by over \$3 billion for the financial year 2009-10. This is obviously needed given the state of the health system in Queensland. Obviously this state is a growth state in Australia. Our population is not only increasing in size but is also ageing. Armed with this statistic, Health becomes one of the most crucial portfolios the government manages or, in the case of this government, mismanages. If only the department of health had the vision and nous to plan for the future growth of health provision in this state.

While I understand that there are many regions in desperate need of upgraded health services, the situation on the Sunshine Coast is at a critical level. The Nambour General Hospital is the base hospital for the region. Nambour is at the bottom of the ladder in terms of category 3 waiting lists and emergency response times. I have heard it said recently by the health professionals that the average recommended standard waiting time for a category 3 patient in Australia is 30 days. On the Sunshine Coast, we are averaging over 100 days.

The services provided by the staff at the hospital are fantastic. The unfortunate fact is that it takes far too long to get into a bed or to be treated by a health professional. In fact, only last night I received an email from a constituent with respect to this issue. This is the simplest way I can explain to the minister the plight of residents on the Sunshine Coast. The email relates to a lady who has bowel cancer. She is 91 years of age and is in very poor health. Today her doctor arranged for her to be taken by ambulance to hospital. The ambulance could not take her to Nambour as it was apparently full, so she was taken to Caloundra where she sat in a chair from 1 pm to 6 pm as there were no beds there either. At 6 pm the lady's carer received a phone call from the hospital and was asked to come and pick her up. She lives alone and can barely move as she has problems with her back in any event.

The Sunshine Coast held high hopes that our health crisis would be somewhat fixed when the government announced the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, a 650-bed public hospital that is needed to alleviate the shortage of beds on the Sunshine Coast and will be a designated tertiary facility. That facility will dramatically improve the health services offered by the government in the Sunshine Coast health district. The facility will take the pressure off the public hospitals not only on the Sunshine Coast but also in Brisbane. Now we have heard of its delay by up to three years, all because the health minister and Treasurer somehow, two days before the budget was brought down, realised that we are in a global financial crisis and announced that they could not afford it. This is despite a spokesman for the health minister, some 18 days earlier, confirming that everything was on track with the hospital and that the deadline would be met. I would have thought that the replacement for the Premier, the future and maybe in this term the new Labor leader, would have more to say about the dealings of this Labor government.

The government can fund this hospital but chooses not to on the basis of political priority. It has been reported to me that the government did, in fact, have contact from parties interested in building the Sunshine Coast University Hospital by its original deadline of 2014. What has happened? The estimates

committee report indicates that some of the issues considered by the committee were the projections for staff increases, the employment of additional doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, travel for patients to receive specialist medical treatment et cetera.

The situation whereby Sunshine Coast residents have to travel back and forth to Brisbane on a daily basis is appalling. Whether the Sunshine Coast suffers because of its proximity to Brisbane is debatable, but what is certain is that those patients are having their health jeopardised by the wear and tear that the travel is having on their general health. Talk about kicking someone when they are already down. I have some personal experience regarding this matter. My mother, a recovering cancer patient, had to travel back and forth from Caloundra to Brisbane for treatment. Luckily she had the support of her family and was strong-willed enough to survive the ordeal. Others are not as fortunate. The Sunshine Coast is a growing region and we need a serious review of the types of medical services offered at the hospitals.

We have all heard my colleague the member for Caloundra note a document that he received. It was the minister's speech notes in which the minister's adviser said, 'Talk about guff in the budget, positive guff.' I ask members opposite if they know what is the definition of guff?

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I can tell the member for Everton that the definition of guff is nonsense. The government treats the health services on the Sunshine Coast as if they were full of guff. The budget is full of guff and, unless and until this government gets serious, the health minister's adviser is right: all they can do is talk about guff and nonsense because that is all they have.