



Speech by  
**Curtis Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

Hansard Tuesday, 3 August 2010

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## **CAIRNS, HEALTH SERVICES**

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.51 pm): At the last election one of my top priorities was the future of health facilities for Far North Queensland and Labor put forward a two-pronged strategy: a \$446.3 million redevelopment of the existing Cairns Base Hospital site and the acquisition of land for a health facility in the southern suburbs of Cairns. In March Queensland Health made a statement that short-listing for potential sites was well advanced, with confidential negotiations underway. Whether it is at business functions I attend or street stalls that I hold, people tell me they want an end to the delay. Residents are demanding certainty about the location of this future health facility.

I am a vocal supporter of the Bruce Highway upgrade and the Cairns transit network projects, but I concede that aligning site selection with planning for those projects has perhaps contributed to the delay. I am sure that most people would agree that the location needs to be easily accessible to as many residents as possible. However, the announcement of the master plan for those projects has come and gone. Like many of my constituents, I am very keen for a decision on this issue. I know it will put many people's minds at rest and provide some assurance that the southern suburbs are not being forgotten when it comes to the future health needs of our region. An announcement of a southern corridor health facility would be another major step towards the continued shaping of Edmonton as the new employment hub for the Cairns region.

However, claims that a fully-fledged hospital is needed instead of the proposed health facility are premature. This year's budget provided the next \$80 million for the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment, as well as \$5.6 million to complete the \$12.7 million Cairns Central Community Health Centre. All of this work will take pressure off the Cairns Base Hospital. We all recognise that the population in the southern suburbs will fill in over the next 20 years. The benefit of a greenfield site is that it will allow room for growth so that the facility can be expanded. The opportunity also exists for a private health facility to be constructed to complement the government's plans.

I have a great working relationship with the federal member for Leichhardt, Jim Turnour, and I want to commend the Australian government for its commitment to planning for the future health services in our region, including the investment of \$5 million in the Edmonton GP superclinic, in partnership with Balance Healthcare. It concerns me greatly that Tony Abbott would cut GP superclinics and, in the process, take us backwards. The Edmonton clinic will provide more opportunity for people to access a doctor without the need to drive into the city and, while a mixed billing service will be offered, the vast majority of local residents will be able to access bulk-billing. I am advised that construction is set to begin in September 2010, with the facility expected to be open by July 2011.

Southern corridor residents want certainty about their future health needs. Because of the growth we are experiencing, it is incumbent upon me and other elected representatives to keep up the momentum on project planning and delivery in the southern suburbs. I for one will continue to ask questions to see that this occurs and that we remain on track.