



Speech by

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MOTION: HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.29 pm): I move—

That this House supports the right of Australians to know what happens to a state health system when Kevin Rudd is in charge and calls on the Premier to put into the public domain all cabinet submissions pertaining to Queensland Health for the period 1992 to 1995 when Kevin Rudd was responsible for overseeing health policy as the most senior bureaucrat in Queensland as a director-general of the office of cabinet.

This week we have seen the arrogance of the Bligh Labor government on parade. They have turned their backs on their own supporters. They have persisted with their dishonest campaign of assets sales. They are putting the Prime Minister's job prospects above the health needs of Queenslanders. They have blithely scrapped yet another election promise—this time the cornerstone of their much vaunted green credentials: the Solar Hot Water Program.

This chamber is meant to provide Queenslanders with the truth about their government. It is meant to provide answers to basic questions about the expenditure of taxpayers' money. Even after 21 years of all but unbroken Labor rule, this parliament is meant to cut through the cant. Even in a state where spin doctors outnumber medical doctors, it is meant as a small haven for truth.

Mr Fraser: Do you want us to release '96 and '97?

Mr LANGBROEK: I move this motion today because, although each sitting day questions are asked and statements are made in response—

Mr Fraser: Why don't you release what happens in shadow cabinet now?

Mr LANGBROEK: Why don't you go sit back in your own chair? The opposition and the media in this state cannot rely on anything said by the Premier or her ministers in this forum or in any other.

Now we are told that the Commonwealth-state relationship is to be radically re-engineered, that our front-line hospitals—our teaching and research hospitals like Royal Brisbane and the Mater—will be funded and therefore controlled by bureaucrats 1,500 kilometres away.

Mr Fraser: What about when you took ministerial expenses to the cabinet? They were the good, old days, weren't they?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Treasurer, cease interjecting. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr LANGBROEK: We have been told this proposal comes from a particular source—the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd. Mr Rudd, a resident of Canberra, plans to take 33 per cent of Queensland's principal source of growth revenue—the GST—in exchange for a Canberra based funding nirvana. That is the cracked recording from the Queensland Premier. That is the message on hold from the Queensland health minister. That is the deep space transmission from HAL, the Treasurer, too. But who would believe them?

We are talking about the government that gave Queensland the Nuttall amendment—the rule to break all rules. And we can see it in action. This week we have heard that when the *Pacific Adventurer* spilled thousands of litres of oil across Moreton Bay in the first week of the state election campaign the Labor government had no plan in place to cope with major oil spills. But the Premier had told Queensland everything that could be done was being done, and her transport minister stood in this chamber barefaced to declare the damning report as a sort of Labor triumph—a statement worthy of a special award, not so much an Oscar as a ‘Gordon’. So, once again, a little more of the mirage of responsibility this government conjured at election time evaporated. Another reel of the Disney fantasy it played for Queenslanders bounced off the projector and went rolling across the floor.

Since the election, not a day has gone by without one or another Bligh promise being revealed as a sham. This Premier is so vain and her credibility so totally shattered that Queenslanders have just switched off. They see government spin on the TV news. They read it in the paper. They log on to it. But they are not listening. They are sitting back out there on their porches, swinging that baseball bat, awaiting their opportunity.

We know that since his shocking mismanagement of the Home Insulation Program, Prime Minister Rudd’s reputation has been on the slide as well. So a scheme from a panicked Prime Minister backed by the questionable government of Queensland has to be treated with a high degree of scepticism. That is why this motion poses such a very modest request and why it deserves full support from every member of this chamber.

Among the many fantasies and fairytales spun by this lazy government has been a claim that it is a genuine advocate for the release of material under freedom of information and now right to information processes. It touts its involvement with right to information. It wears it like a badge. But, as we all know, the Labor government is less transparent today than ever. Let’s consider this current request as a gauge.

In 2008, the government commissioned David Solomon as the head of a panel to review the government’s Freedom of Information Act. On page 4 of his report, David Solomon wrote the following words—

... the Panel proposes a reduction in the 30 year rule on Cabinet material, to just 10 years. For exempt incoming ... briefs, parliamentary estimates briefs and question time briefs, the Panel proposes that the exemption expire after 3 years ...

So our request today is designed to provide Queenslanders and Australians with some independent and truthful advice about the record of the man who would take control of essential health services in our state and across the nation.

It is a fact that the Prime Minister, his managerial style and his long-held views about the administration of health are well known in Queensland. Mr Rudd was the chief of staff appointed by former Premier Wayne Goss when he came to power in 1989. In 1992, he was promoted to Director-General of the Office of Cabinet and he remained in that position until 1995. So he has form in Queensland. He was the gatekeeper—the controller of the cabinet office. He vetted cabinet submissions and set the agenda for cabinet meetings. He was the first Queensland public servant commonly referred to as ‘Dr Death’.

Mr Rudd was at the centre of the administrative purges run by the Goss government. He set up the gulags, he closed courthouses, railway lines and hospitals. So now, as Prime Minister, Mr Rudd appears in a federal election year with a vague proposal for a dramatic health takeover. In response, his proposal has received a frosty reception in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. In Queensland, Rudd initiatives from the past are recalled with serious concern by the hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders they affected. In many areas of public administration, the then director-general of the cabinet office caused massive destabilisation and job losses.

It is clear that the pain and damage caused by those initiatives contributed directly to the defeat of the Goss government. By and large, those changes remain as discredited today as they were in 1996. Today it is in the public interest for all Australians that we look again at that record and consider to what extent the Rudd of 2010 is seeking to revisit the discredited policies and agendas of his past.

A chief focus of the campaigns staged by the Goss government and directed from the cabinet office by Mr Rudd was in the area of health. Remember that there have been serious concerns voiced from interstate about the current proposals of Prime Minister Rudd. In New South Wales there is a list of 117 small hospitals that clinicians say are likely to close. In Victoria, Premier Brumby says Mr Rudd has sold out his commitment to cooperative federalism and, in Western Australia, Colin Barnett seems set to say no.

The finances of this new Rudd deal are unclear, although the respected economic commentator Henry Ergas had this to say—

... this looks like a huge windfall for the Commonwealth, while stripping the states of more than \$140 billion ... during the next 10 years.

In the absence of a full and proper explanation from the Queensland or Commonwealth governments, we members of the Queensland parliament can still assist by making available the cabinet

office records that apply to the Goss government period when Mr Rudd had his hands on the levers in Queensland Health. Members might recall, for example, an 'old Rudd' green paper that gave Queensland the 'area-isation' of health. This sounds suspiciously similar to the new Rudd proposal for local health networks.

On this side we have been long-standing supporters of local hospital management through the establishment of local hospital boards, but the old Rudd scheme was something altogether different. 'Area-isation', as it was presented in Queensland by Kevin Rudd and Premier Goss, made a travesty out of local representation. It was not about local management; it was about bureaucratic mismanagement. It was not about local community leaders taking responsibility for health services on the ground; it was about a whole new layer of ineffectual bureaucrats devoid of responsibility but replete with every conceivable administrative accessory. No-one in Queensland wants to revisit 'area-isation' with old Rudd or with new Rudd.

Another great example was the Goss government's attack on the QEII Hospital. At the time, it was the third biggest maternity hospital in Queensland, with the third largest accident and emergency unit. In 1988, it was treating 3,000 more injuries a year than the PA. But, in a few short years, under Mr Rudd's direction the QEII was stripped of resources which were then relocated to the Logan Hospital in the electorate of the Premier. Doesn't that sound familiar? Today we have a Premier taking the same steps, stripping the Royal Children's Hospital to create a whole new facility in her own electorate. In any case, the Rudd campaign against the QEII went so far that by the time the coalition won minority government in 1996 the QEII was on the verge of closure. These sorts of memories send shivers up the spines of Queenslanders from the coast to Cape York.

If we apply David Solomon's yardstick, our request is for cabinet and related documents for the period from 1992 to 1995, and the parliamentary briefing notes should be included as well. The government will deny it now, but Queenslanders have seen the way it works and the way it uses its cynical connection with the Labor government of Prime Minister Rudd. They remember the Prime Minister's endorsement of the Bligh government's economic strategy prior to the 2009 state election and the deceitful backflips that followed once the votes were in.

The worst thing would be to see a reversal of roles in six months. We do not want to see the Bligh government endorsing this untenable health scheme. We do not want to see a sham endorsement of the Rudd government or its proposals, only to have to sit through a sham collapse in the relationship once the federal race is run. So, I say to the government: release the documents, release the briefing notes and don't sell out Queensland like you have sold out Queensland unions.

(Time expired)