



Speech by

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QUEENSLAND HEALTH, PAYROLL SYSTEM

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 am): In the past two weeks since parliament last sat, the two major issues have been the nurses pay scandal and the *Shen Neng 1*, which have created major issues for the people of Queensland from an environmental perspective and a financial perspective, particularly for those nurses and other health workers who have not been paid for up to three pay cycles. Let us have a look at some of the details of the pay scandal and then have a look at some of the responses we have had when we have tried to hold ministers and the Premier responsible this morning—the Minister for Public Works and ICT supposedly working in conjunction with the Minister for Health and reporting to the Premier.

Today we have heard the remarkable admission from the Minister for Health that he is not actually qualified to do his job in terms of assessing things within his portfolio, ignoring long-held Westminster provisions about the responsibilities of ministers. The Minister for Health used the excuse that he is a 'solicitor' and he is 'dealing with a former teacher who is also a chippie'. These are incredible admissions from the Minister for Health, who is basically saying—who knows what he is really saying about what is his job as health minister or the various other portfolios he has held.

If ministers are only supposed to have qualifications in the fields for which they are ministers but he does not have professional qualifications in the field for which he is a minister, then what on earth is he doing as the Minister for Health? Does it mean that we are only supposed to have doctors as ministers for health? No-one has said that. No-one has claimed that. I certainly do not claim as a health professional that I should therefore be the minister for health. But it is certainly an understanding in the Westminster tradition that a minister does have responsibility for things that happen in their ministry and it is not because of their qualifications. Ministerial responsibility is a long-held tradition of the Westminster system, yet very clearly the second most senior minister within the government, the Deputy Premier, has this morning made the remarkable statement that he is not qualified to do his job. He clearly could not answer the questions that were put to him today.

Let us look again at the circumstances of this pay scandal. We have nurses and health workers who cannot afford to pay their rent, who cannot afford to pay their bills, who cannot afford to put food on the table. There is anecdotal evidence of some people using tea towels instead of nappies because they cannot afford to buy them; borrowing or begging \$20 and \$50 from people; raiding money from their children's piggy banks; being subjected to late payment fees; being subjected to threats of eviction. We have not had any denials of this from the government this morning in question time. In fact, we had the remarkable acknowledgement by the Deputy Premier that there is a commitment to fund out-of-pocket expenses. If ever we had a government that deals with things by crisis management, here again we had an admission from the health minister that there is a commitment to fund out-of-pocket costs.

Where will it stop? What costs are going to be covered—direct-debiting costs, bounced cheque costs? Who is going to assess what these costs are? Or will it be more like the many other provisions that this government makes, whether it is for drought relief or flood relief—announce it on the day and then set the bar too high for people to jump over? Or will it be like as we saw yesterday with the clean energy fund?

That fund was announced with great fanfare in 2007-08 to supposedly encourage businesses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But then very quietly this \$50 million commitment disappeared because once again no-one fit the criteria. That is probably what we had from the health minister this morning.

The opposition calls on the minister to tell us the details of the commitment to fund out-of-pocket costs of the health workers who have not been paid appropriately. How are they going to recover those costs? Once again, we know that crisis management clearly costs more than proper planning. Yet the health minister has tried to make a virtue of the fact that there had not been a proper crossover between Lattice and the new SAP payroll scheme and has tried to make out that there was nothing unusual about that. Very obviously this crisis is a consequence of poor planning and once again we see crisis management. We have seen a litany of crisis management—whether it is the water grid or whether it is planning for growth and infrastructure planning. That is where this government has let the people of Queensland down now for nigh on 20 years. But this government just does not learn.

Very obviously we had a minister who did not deny the fact this morning that he refused to be woken from his lull when he was first advised of the pay dramas. One of his advisers said, 'It would have to be a major drama for the minister to step in.' Very obviously he did not consider it a major drama because it did not affect him. He would rather be wearing a hard hat on a bridge project or a road project somewhere. This is very obviously a health minister who never wanted the job. He did not want the job; he still does not want the job. Even when he came in here and made his ministerial statement this morning, it was done in a hushed tone. He rapidly read through it so no-one could hear the details. We will have to look at the details in *Hansard*. That was very different to the 'Foghorn Leghorn' who loves to rant and rave about any other issue that does not involve health. That is what we get from this health minister.

We heard from the Premier this morning that Labor will keep every cent of the \$191,000 given by the Nurses Union at the last election. Supposedly the Nurses Union officials would have said to their workers then, 'Yes, this is Labor. They will be standing up for us.' But look at what is happening now. The government cannot even pay its nurses properly. It does beg the question of the Nurses Union and their executive: why aren't they here outside the parliament demanding that their nurses be paid appropriately? Can members imagine if it were the LNP that had missed up to three pay cycles? This is the side of the parliament that is actually standing up for workers and demanding that workers be paid appropriately. We do not see the Nurses Union here standing up for them. We do not see the government standing up for them, apart from the platitudes that the government is giving them.

This is the side that believes that employers have to pay their employees, especially the government. If the government will not do it then the LNP opposition will stand up for the workers of Queensland, as we have done since the election last year in March on the issue of privatisation and now on the issue of pay. All we get from the Premier is, 'Let them eat cake.' That is the Premier's response to calls that Labor do the only honourable thing and give the money back to the Nurses Union.

We have had staff at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital told to seek the assistance of charities for supermarket vouchers for food and financial assistance. They were provided with phone lists for the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and the Wesley Mission. This is a payroll system that was supposed to save money. Surely when you bring in a new system it is supposed to save money, but it is actually costing money. As I understand it from the shadow minister for public works and ICT, this is up to \$50 million in Health and \$180 million across government. Knowing this government and its hiding of things, it could well be, and probably is, much more than that. These are answers that the government needs to give to the parliament and to the people of Queensland.

Today again from the health minister we had no guarantees that at the next payday people in Queensland Health and across government will be properly paid. There were no guarantees, only a vague commitment that 'we'll do the best we can' and 'people are working hard'. It is not good enough for those people who are struggling throughout Queensland. He also refused to say exactly when he got his first personal phone call from the Queensland Nurses Union boss, Gay Hawksworth, pleading for her members to be paid. There are so many other issues in relation to which we need to have answers. We need to hear from the Minister for Public Works and ICT, who made a trip to Germany to speak to the people who were bringing in this company—

An opposition member: A jaunt.

Mr LANGBROEK: He had a jaunt to Germany. What are the penalties for poor performance? What are the penalties for what has happened in this situation? Just as the Minister for Sport was unable to negotiate with the IMG and A1GP promoters as to what the penalties would be if they did not live up to their contracts, I suspect in this portfolio, as in others, no contractual negotiations have been carried out such that, if you do not live up to your contract, you are going to pay the penalty. Why? Because the Minister for Sport is not qualified in his portfolio either.

Mr REEVES: Madam Deputy Speaker, apart from having a sports management degree, I find those words offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O'Neill): Order! I ask the honourable member to withdraw those comments.

Mr LANGBROEK: I withdraw, Madam Deputy Speaker. I look forward to seeing him drive an A1GP vehicle when it finally gets here. In contrast to this, when the Treasurer says that the LNP is not releasing policies, I promise this: we will restore confidence in our state. We are going to stop privatisations. We are going to stop issues like mistruths being told to parliament. We are going to stop poor planning and crisis management, which we see from this government. Most importantly, I want to restore confidence to Queensland. That is what my commitment is.

I invite the Treasurer to come and hear me speak at CEDA about governance issues where I promise that ministers in an LNP Langbroek government will live up to ministerial responsibilities as per the Westminster tradition and will not fob off things with excuses such as 'I'm not qualified'. We are qualified and we will prove it at the next election.