




Speech by

Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 30 November 2011

MULGRAVE ELECTORATE

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (11.39 pm): Sometimes in politics smoke and mirrors can be used too often. There is no better example of that than a recent letter to the editor in the *Cairns Sun* where Katter's Australian Party candidate in Mulgrave said that there is an urgent need for a second hospital in Cairns to meet the future needs of Far North Queensland. Talk about stating the obvious. He, as well as the LNP candidate for Mulgrave, have been puffing up their chests on this issue for months now. Each and every time they have called for a second hospital they have conveniently forgot to mention that I have been working on this since I was elected in 2009, not just since the last cyclone season.

Both of them fail to mention two key points in their arguments. Firstly, that as part of the Bligh government I have been responsible for securing the land on which any proposed health facility would be built. We safeguarded the land as part of our plan that we took to the last election—the \$446.3 million redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital—and laid the foundations for future health services in the fast-growing southern corridor. The Bligh government is now delivering new health services sooner and closer to home through Australia's largest health infrastructure program.

Secondly, it is in the recently announced Queensland Infrastructure Plan. In short, it is happening. The Queensland Infrastructure Plan clearly outlines the government's intention to open a new health precinct at Edmonton between 2015 and 2021, with a brand new hospital for South Cairns to follow in the future. But I have been on the record numerous times as disagreeing with the experts who say we should wait until 2021 for an Edmonton health facility. I want to see something on the ground sooner and completed by 2015. I think the demand is there.

But what takes the cake is that on 19 February this year a two-page spread in the *Cairns Post* saw the Katter's Australian Party candidate put forward the hair brain position that a new health facility could be built for \$25 million. Based on this price tag, their facility would have no surgery capacity, no ED capacity and no capacity to have an alternate site in the event of a disaster, including it being built to a high cyclone capacity. The Katter party's proposal to build a \$25 million facility could simply not provide the services needed. They have no idea of what the real costs are, not to mention they have no idea how they would fund it.

Worst of all, they were suggesting that work should halt on the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment of blocks A, B and C, which features most of the medical services and patient beds, until future health needs could be debated. That is an absurd proposition. Those beds are needed right now. Do not get me started on what turning off the bulldozers and downing tools on the biggest construction job in the region would mean for local jobs.

This is the sort of talk and more magic pudding economics from populist political aspirants. Voters in Mulgrave are far smarter than that. Let us be clear: both the LNP and the Katter party are calling for something that our government and me as the local member have already committed to. I will continue to campaign for the health precinct to be delivered sooner rather than later, to provide health services to our growing region as well as to act as a backup to the Cairns Base Hospital in the event of a major emergency.