



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Tuesday, 6 September 2011

QUEENSLAND HEALTH, PAYROLL SYSTEM

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (11.21 am): The shoot-the-messenger, bullying culture of this government was on display this morning. The response from Minister Simon Finn with regard to the issue of the Health payroll debacle—when it was publicly revealed that this government was alerted—was an absolute disgrace. The government was warned that it would be catastrophic, but its response is to attack the messengers. It is now 506 days and \$220 million since Premier Bligh promised that her government would work day and night to fix the Health payroll system, and it still is not fixed! Thousands of doctors, nurses and allied health workers still wait nervously each fortnight to see if they have been correctly paid or paid at all. It is about two weeks since I asked Premier Bligh in this parliament whether the senior public servant responsible for ICT projects in the public works department, which oversaw the Health payroll system, has since been promoted to director-general. The Premier laughed it off as if this was some great joke. However, more seriously today—

Mr FINN: I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. The director-general of Public Works was not on the project board that ran the Health payroll system. She was not the director-general of Public Works at the time the payroll system was procured and had no responsibility in the go-live decision. The member misleads the House. I ask her to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Are you making a point of order or do you wish to refer this to the Ethics Committee?

Mr FINN: I am simply saying that what the member is saying to the House is incorrect. I am asking her to withdraw that statement.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: If the member wishes to pursue that, he needs to refer it to the Ethics Committee.

Ms SIMPSON: Perhaps to help the minister, I refer him to the fact that this particular public servant actually oversaw the ICT section of the department. If the ICT section was not over the Health payroll section—goodness me—what a mess we have in this government! It will not even take responsibility for lines of command.

Mr FINN: I rise to a point of order. The member continues to mislead the House. The Health payroll system was overseen by a project board of which the current director-general, Natalie MacDonald, was not a member.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. If the member wishes to pursue this, please refer it to the Ethics Committee.

Ms SIMPSON: This government laughed it off and then tried to shoot the messenger because it was warned that it was going to be catastrophic. Unfortunately, those who have paid the price are the doctors, the nurses, the allied health workers and all of the workers within Queensland Health. More seriously, today it has been revealed through leaked notes of a meeting of 9 September 2009 that the senior public servant I mentioned in that question had met with independent ICT experts who warned the government

that the Health payroll system was facing catastrophic issues, and this was months before the system went live.

Some 506 days and \$220 million later, the problem is not fixed today. It is always more expensive and difficult to fix a crisis when it has happened than to avert it. But, no, this government shoots the messenger. No-one takes responsibility in this government. If one looks at its chain of command, very conveniently it tried to rip it up after the event.

To date, the total cost of this payroll system has been at least \$283 million, which is equivalent to the wages of 4,700 nurses for one year. What a waste of money in the way that this government has bungled this! The reason the system has not been fixed is found in the sarcastic and flippant responses of the minister and the Premier, because it is part of the same toxic bullying culture of shooting the messenger and denying responsibility. It is pervasive in this government. It is what this government's culture is about. No-one takes responsibility and when there are divergent views that are seeking to cut waste, to improve productivity and, most of all, to serve Queenslanders better, it wants to shoot them down.

I would urge good public servants to help deliver better and more cost-effective services in Queensland and join us in this campaign to see a reform of the way government is delivered for the sake of Queenslanders. There are many genuine public servants who are frustrated with the waste and the inefficiency of the state's bureaucracy because they have also experienced the same problem. This government has a habit of shooting the messenger and then bullying them, and that is why we have seen this debacle with regard to the Health payroll system. It is time the good rank-and-file public servants had a say about how to reform government to cut the cost of living. We are listening and we want to hear from them.

The high cost of living as a result of the Bligh Labor government's mismanagement affects all Queenslanders. Queensland now has the highest cost of all of the states to run a car, thanks to the deceitful way this government took away the fuel tax rebate and the deceitful way it increased registration—and the list goes on. It is time we saw a reform of government to cut the waste and to respect the professional voice of those who will speak without fear or favour and who are not part of this Labor government's culture and ways. We are determined, under Campbell Newman, to give a voice to the voiceless and to empower Queenslanders again by cutting the waste. We can do more for Queensland—more in services, more in infrastructure and more in relieving the costs of living.