




Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Wednesday, 9 March 2011

ATHERTON HOSPITAL, CHEMOTHERAPY SERVICES

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (12.00 pm): This morning I tabled a petition of 1,976 signatures from the residents of the Atherton Tablelands calling for a government commitment that there are no plans to cut back chemotherapy services at the Atherton Hospital. The petition also calls for a government commitment to continue funding these services as the loss of the chemotherapy unit will impact severely on cancer sufferers, their families and the community.

This petition was initiated in response to feedback that the service was going to be phased out and moved to the Cairns Base Hospital almost 100 kilometres away. In November last year I questioned the previous minister in relation to this and he replied that there were no plans to phase out chemotherapy services at the Atherton Hospital. However, Tablelanders are very sceptical and rightly so. Residents have seen many health services removed or delayed with no consideration for the negative impact on the Tablelands community. They want to ensure that vital services such as the chemotherapy unit remain and are funded adequately into the future so that they can continue to provide the quality care that the chemo unit at the Atherton Hospital gives.

The scepticism of Tablelanders is entrenched in the long list of promises by the Labor government regarding services on the Atherton Tablelands. It is entrenched in a six-year promise for a CT scanner which we are still waiting for; it is entrenched in the promise of the west wing at the Mareeba Hospital that lay idle for years until a recent positive announcement; and it is engraved in the promise of an upgrade of the ambulance station and healthcare centre in Ravenshoe that in 10 months has got no further than being pegged out.

This petition is reflective of the deep scepticism that these communities have towards this government's policy to centralise health services. This petition shows that any inkling of a removal of the chemo unit at the Atherton Hospital will spark massive revolt. The previous minister gave a halfhearted response that there are no changes planned for the removal of the chemo unit at the Atherton Hospital. Tablelanders want and deserve an iron-clad guarantee from the new Minister for Health that this vital service will not be removed and a firm commitment that the chemo unit will continue to be adequately funded in the future.