




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

MOTION: AGED CARE

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.55 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the opposition and against the government's amendment to the motion. This private member's motion has been prompted by the recent announcement of the closure of two public residential units at the Eventide aged-care campus at Brighton on Brisbane's north side and the Wynnum Hospital and aged-care facilities on Brisbane's bayside. The closures will impact on many residents directly, and let us not forget the staff who it can be assumed are likely to lose their jobs as well. I suppose it is not an unusual phenomena for this government or its agents.

What I find quite incredible is that the spokesman for the health minister has deferred all responsibility to local health board chairman Dr Paul Alexander in one of these circumstances. It has often been suggested to me that the government would use the new health boards in a manner that would allow them to claim ignorance of decisions. I suppose it is a version of plausible deniability in effect. Plausible deniability was a term coined by the intelligence community many years ago in the United States when they deliberately withheld information from senior officials in order to protect those officials from exposure to blame if illegal or unpopular activities were exposed.

I hate to rock the boat, but I guess the minister is accountable and people should accept that. No amount of delegated decision making or decentralisation that I, in fact, favour in principle divests the minister of personal accountability for all the decisions that are made. That is why we have ministers in this parliament. That is what the community expects.

There seems to be some recognition of this from the minister because I note that he is reported in the media as requesting that Dr Alexander give some substance to the board's intentions, though I find that simply incredible. I believe that Dr Alexander served many decades ago as a regimental medical officer in the 3rd Battalion where our service overlapped briefly. He went on to become a senior Army officer. I cannot imagine a man of his experience being so naive as to fly this proposal without first alerting the minister's office. I cannot believe a military and medical professional of his standing would take such steps unannounced and in complete isolation from the minister's office. If that were the case then the board has displayed extraordinary ineptitude and insensitivity or the minister is deliberately seeking to detach himself from some of the more unpalatable, poorly constructed decisions that are clearly evident. Either way, it is a symptom of systems failure.

Let me put it to the minister like this. If you were to tell the board to reverse those closures, what would they do? Of course they would be redirected and the decisions would be voided. This government promised many things and ministerial accountability for all decisions within their portfolios remains a centrepiece of ethical decision making and transparency. This is not evident in the recent events and the minister's detachment from such decisions is frankly unacceptable.

This government possesses an overwhelming majority in this chamber. At no stage in the lead-up to the 24 March election or at any time up to the present, including during estimates, did the government seek a mandate to walk away from its aged-care responsibilities. I understand that recently the Premier has

made comments suggesting that the Queensland government was not in aged-care business or was seeking to remove itself from the aged-care business. This is an incredible statement.

For many years I had a friend who was a two-term conservative mayor of Rockhampton. We would meet from time to time and inevitably discuss all things political. One of the things that he repeatedly raised with me and mentioned to me was the poor form Labor had in terms of dealing with aged-care facilities and the one shining light in his period as mayor was the period of the Borbidge government. He would reinforce to me often the successful outcomes delivered in aged care in Rockhampton when he worked in collaboration with the Borbidge government.

I can assume that he would not be deliberately misleading me or overplaying his hand. I do not know what has changed within conservative politics to take this path. It is clearly evident to me and to anyone who understands the issue and the geography of Queensland that the effective response to this burgeoning issue of aged care in our communities can only be delivered by all three tiers of government working collaboratively in a transparent and cooperative manner. It is simply unacceptable to our communities for any particular tier to attempt to shift their responsibilities elsewhere. By the way, such moves will certainly result in the rapid decline of services across regional and remote Queensland. I would think that many members of the LNP in this House understand this and should be gravely concerned by the messages being sent out presently. Shame on this government. Shame on your insensitivity and your lack of compassion. Shame on your appalling corporate communication.