




Speech by

Dr Chris Davis

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Wednesday, 30 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Dr DAVIS** (Stafford—LNP) (9.12 pm): I rise to pledge my allegiance to the Queen and to thank the Governor for the direction she has given this government. I also congratulate Madam Speaker on her appointment. I also rise to thank the people of Stafford for the opportunity to be part of this Newman LNP government, one that has already begun to deliver for the people of Queensland, including my very precious electorate. A key strength of this government is the quality and diversity of experience in learning in its members. I look forward to adding my contribution here in this House and, most importantly, in service to the people of Stafford.

From my observations it is very clear that the old saying that wishes us health, wealth and happiness is pivotal to our society, and of course the flow-on effects from health are wealth and happiness. I am very fortunate to have been working in health for many decades as a public hospital doctor and to have served my profession and the public through a number of professional bodies. During that time patients and healthcare providers and the wider community have shown that they deserve and need a good government to achieve good health. The people have now voted and the work has started.

Acknowledging the importance of health to individuals and the community and how critical effective provision of health care is to the wellbeing of governments, I have taken the liberty of focusing mainly on health in this speech. In doing so, I have also noted the many colleagues who have mentioned healthcare issues in their speeches. Further relevance can be found in the size of the state Health budget at around \$11 billion, or one-quarter of our expenditure. I must stress that what I will be saying is my view based on lengthy observation and reflection. I am also duty bound to remind everybody of their right to a second opinion.

Further relevance is that Queensland's major cardiothoracic hospital, the Prince Charles Hospital, is in my electorate, as is a large private hospital and major aged-care service providers. They are of course also a major source of employment. My focus on health does not in any way reflect a lesser awareness of or commitment to all the other needs of my electorate. I have lived there for 20 years and raised my children and through that process have got to know the needs of the area.

Immediately prior to my election I was also working as the Director of Geriatric Medicine at the Prince Charles Hospital. My clinical role included the management of brain dysfunction contributing to errors in memory and judgement. I also taught and contributed to research in this field. As such, I cannot avoid being aware of the potential errors we can make in our thinking and conduct and how, as politicians, the effort, skill and integrity we apply in our thinking processes have critical implications for the people we serve and indeed our political longevity.

As mentioned by the honourable health minister earlier today, who I am also honoured to be assisting, the Queensland Health payroll saga is one example of wrong thinking and worse by the Queensland Labor government. This has adversely affected the majority of Queenslanders and now requires our cognitive skills to fix. Time does not allow me to detail the multiple inexcusable and avoidable errors of omission and commission that have thus far wasted at least \$400 million of hard-earned taxpayer

funds so desperately needed for patient care. The failures of that system have also caused enormous distress to many Queensland Health staff in my electorate and throughout the state.

But even more serious is another decision by the former Beattie government. Unless satisfactorily resolved, the damage from that may surpass the payroll debacle by many orders of magnitude and adversely affect many very vulnerable stakeholders for decades ahead. To illustrate this matter, I wish to run through what ought to have been done, the conduct that instead occurred, the consequences thereof and consideration of potential solutions. I do so because it is a matter that directly affects my electorate and arguably my broader responsibility, through the Minister for Health, to all Queenslanders.

On 30 September 2005 the final report of the Queensland Health Systems Review, the Forster review, was tabled in this parliament. I was pleased to have been an adviser to that report. It was one of the responses to the tragic Bundaberg Hospital matter. The expert report was welcomed by both sides of politics and professional organisations. It called for significant reform in many areas including the planning of Queensland Health's capital works. It noted funding pressures caused by poor project budget definition, a lack of transparency surrounding decision making for the allocation of capital funds and failure to receive best value for money. We have seen evidence of all of those failures over the preceding years. To try to avoid these issues, recommendation 11.4 of the report stated—

Queensland Health base all future decisions regarding the location of health facilities on a transparent, patient focused process that ensures wide community and stakeholder involvement together with relevant advice from technical experts. All decisions should be supported by full documentation, to enable independent review and ensure accountability and probity of decisions.

At 4.34 pm on 30 March 2006—a mere six months after these best practice recommendations had been tabled—the then Labor government completely ignored the recommendation. Instead, following a one-hour session of this House, it resolved to effectively close the Royal Children's Hospital by 2014 and relocate its services to a new facility to be built in the then member for South Brisbane's electorate.

It is an example of political self-interest that fails the public interest test absolutely and, as such, is recommended, if disturbing, reading. As anticipated in the Forster report, the consequence thus far has been a project cost blow-out estimated to be at least \$700 million, so nearly twice that of the payroll saga, and there are still two years to completion. Even more serious is the high risk that the project could well fail in terms of its stated intention to provide world-class paediatric services and may in fact result in women's and children's health services in the state being set back for decades. This is not just my opinion. There is organisational research that shows up to 75 per cent of such interventions fail when conducted without proper process.

In Madam Speaker's address to this House she spoke of the establishment of the royal women's hospital followed appropriately by the establishment of the Royal Children's Hospital. That relationship today remains as essential as it did at its inception. Compliance with the Forster report would have allowed examination of critical linkages between children, maternal and adult services as well as research and teaching activities—linkages that I can say, and my colleagues agree, are vital for attracting and retaining the best paediatric clinicians, researchers and educators to Queensland. They are needed for world-class care to in turn inspire and teach current and future colleagues on how to deliver the very best care for children and families, and through their expertise the best value for taxpayers.

The Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP in her first speech in the House of Representatives as the member for Brisbane spoke thus. Unfortunately, many of the clinical and research synergies that currently work to the best advantage of all Queenslanders will be lost because of the short-sighted decision by the then Queensland government to close the Royal Children's Hospital. This is a decision which is 'both hasty and illogical and hardly transparent in my opinion—sadly a process that is all too common for the (then Labor) Queensland government'. She went on to say, 'The northern suburbs of Brisbane including Windsor, Alderley, Gordon Park and Grange are fast-growing areas for families and these are the very suburbs that will be adversely affected by the loss not only of their dedicated paediatric emergency department but also of 130 years of medical expertise and excellence.' These are suburbs in my electorate of Stafford. There have been a number of other critical assessments of this decision including a paper on this matter that Dr Harry Smith and I published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*—a peer reviewed journal—and the veracity of the concerns in that article have never to our knowledge been challenged.

We need a solution. We will be told by those appointed by the previous government to ensure carriage of this decision that there is now no option but to proceed. This is the sunk cost error described by economists. In other words, if you travel some distance down the wrong road, the energy and time already wasted oblige you to keep going. Another potential error is to assume that a single academic children's hospital for Queensland is better than two. Sydney and Melbourne have made clear decisions in recent times to have more than one. Indeed, managed competition provides consumers with choice and avoids the risk of complacency and worse associated with a monopoly. While one hospital might be better for a

very small number of highly specialised children, for the great majority ready access to quality routine specialist care is arguably more important.

Furthermore, one hospital, I am told, will not provide the capacity for the future let alone the present. The proposed emergency department as a substitute at the Prince Charles Hospital makes little sense when a world-class one currently exists and is far more appropriately located with all other services at Herston, especially in conjunction with maternity services. If we are going to explore private-public partnerships to financially sustain two hospitals, the new building in South Brisbane would seem better suited to this. If we get this wrong—and I sincerely hope we will not—it will adversely affect paediatric services throughout Queensland for decades. This matter needs a way forward that best serves the needs of sick children in Queensland, not one that perpetuates and thereby rewards appalling self-serving conduct by the Labor Party.

The Forster report goes on to detail numerous other areas of Queensland Health that need to operate effectively. The necessity to do so becomes greater as the pressures on the system increase. The current exponential funding demands are outstripping state revenue growth by about six per cent per annum. In approximately two decades on current projections, public hospital care has the potential to consume the state's entire revenue. This requires us to ensure that every available healthcare dollar is used effectively. The information systems needed to guide this are either nonexistent or problematic.

Current and reliable data are needed to ensure patient safety as well as run the business of health in an economic and efficient manner. Data is needed to redirect resources where they are most effective and to identify models of care that are in the best interests of patients at a particular point in their life. Good data will help us guide investment in critical services such as palliative care and mental health. Another vital area is closing the 10-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In my opinion, the practice of developing information systems in a piecemeal fashion is not effective. My MBA dissertation was on hospital information systems. Major IT healthcare initiatives should be developed for Australia-wide use, especially as we move to new national funding models. The sooner we have a government in Canberra that is free to focus on the national interest rather than self-interest, the sooner we can begin work on such initiatives that will help us get Queensland back on track.

Given health's complexity, it is also very reliant on having well-qualified, high-performing people in key positions, both clinical and non-clinical. This is the major determinant of whether health will continue to earn the poisoned chalice label. Einstein observed that you do not solve issues using the thinking that created them. We need to ensure that we have people capable of thinking and doing in a way that will resolve rather than perpetuate problems. We certainly can be grateful for the many fine staff we already have in our health system. Nonperformance and wasted resources concern them as much as the patients whose reasonable expectations cannot be met.

Whilst one of the most shameful governments in Queensland's history has left us with huge healthcare and financial headaches, these must not detract from the necessity to proactively build a better and brighter Queensland. My leadership positions in professional organisations have contributed to my awareness of how vital a whole lot of factors are to ensuring health and happiness in our communities. Key amongst these is an education that allows people to pursue meaningful and rewarding jobs.

The LNP's employment target is not only good for the economy but also a significant contributor to one's health. Together with all-important family input, education also teaches the life skills to care for others in an increasingly complex world. This requires support for teachers, parents and schools. The Stafford electorate has fine state and Catholic schools, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with them in their essential role.

The role of sport and recreation with its health and team-building benefits has been mentioned by others. The electorate of Stafford is very fortunate to have a large number of sporting and recreational clubs with inspired leadership and talented members. We are also blessed with many places of worship, with inspiring spiritual leaders and their congregations.

During my campaigning I met many hardworking business proprietors and their staff. The responsibility to ensure that their investment and hard work are rewarded is another area of my responsibility. My MBA and experience as a company director are relevant in understanding the need for this government to lower input and compliance costs for these vital small and medium-size businesses.

The manner in which the Airport Link project in my electorate was set up and run is something that I would never have allowed on my watch. To have subjected residents to sleep deprivation and other stresses is unnecessary and unacceptable. The newspapers continue to carry accounts of issues such as secondary damage to council roads where no provision appears to have been made to remedy that.

Putting that obligation on to local government and ratepayers is yet another example of how Labor failed the people of Stafford.

I express my gratitude to everyone who has made it possible for me to put forward my views in this House. Starting with my parents, I am aware that they had to deal with their firstborn contracting infantile paralysis, also known as polio. I spent many months in hospital and they spent untold hours visiting me. Their incredible ongoing support, love and encouragement greatly contributed to my progress through life, as has that of my siblings. The fantastic care I received as a young child from nurses, doctors and physiotherapists greatly influenced my decision to do medicine and serve as a public hospital doctor.

My ability to secure a scholarship to do medicine was due to a wonderful education, and I have enduring gratitude and admiration for my teachers. In medical practice I have derived enormous benefit from my many mentors and colleagues. I particularly wish to thank Dr Zelle Hodge for being a truly inspiring and valued mentor. I could spend my entire speech thanking the team at Prince Charles Hospital for all they do. I also thank the many patients and families who have inspired me, the older Queenslanders who have shared their wisdom with me and especially the war veterans whose sacrifice and hardships in fighting for our freedom guide me when I find myself lacking in courage and determination.

The LNP is a great team within and beyond this House. Fighting for change is not easy, but we always found the energy for it thanks to our united belief that the electorate needed and deserved better. I was truly amazed and humbled by the wonderful people who helped me on the campaign. I cannot mention them all but to all I give my sincere thanks—particularly my campaign director, Ms Susan Macdonald, for her clear thinking, composure and hard work; deputy Justin Lynch and his wife, Elizabeth; secretary Darryl Dobson; and treasurer Rod Anderson. The magnificent contribution of Mrs Marie McCullagh and Mrs Joan Stomfai were pivotal to success in Stafford.

Others have mentioned the professionalism of the LNP party and HQ team, and I totally concur with that. Their skill in using just the right balance of carrots and sticks was very effective. Special thanks go to the Premier and his wonderful family for crossing our mutual border as often as they did and especially for their magnificent ongoing leadership.

My thanks also go to federal and local government members for all of their help. The honourable member for Caloundra, now Minister for Energy and Water Supply, has been a good friend and mentor over many years. I congratulate him on his elevation and thank him. My thanks also go to his former adviser, Mr Francis Quinlivan.

The people of Stafford whom I met in the process greatly strengthened my determination to fight for the right to serve them. I thank them very deeply for their support and kindness, both prior to and subsequent to the election.

My wife, Dr Katharine Sinclair, constantly inspires me with her dedication to her patients as a public hospital doctor. My only complaint is that she has worked out all my faults. She is a tower of strength in every way imaginable, supplemented by her knowledge of good political conduct through observing her father, the late Sir George Sinclair, during his 15 years in the British House of Commons.

This government as assembled by the LNP and voted in by the people of Queensland provides a unique opportunity to now govern this state with great ability, integrity and wisdom, guided by a unity of purpose that is the public interest. The work has begun and I greatly value the opportunity to play my part serving the people of Stafford.