




Speech by

Dr Chris Davis

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

MOTION: HEALTH, COMMONWEALTH FUNDING

 **Dr DAVIS** (Stafford—LNP) (12.50 pm): At a time when we are still feeling the legacy of the previous Labor government which brought Queensland to its economic knees and also Queensland Health, the federal Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister is determined to add injury to insult by draining the lifeblood from clinical critical front-line services. Let us quickly review why Queensland Health is already on the economic ropes. There was the notorious payroll system—a \$1.25 billion black hole—and the opposition continues to refuse the critical documents that might assist the people of Queensland to get their money back. In last Saturday's *Courier-Mail* noted journalist Des Houghton quoted Dr David Slaughter, recently retired Medical Superintendent of the Royal Children's Hospital, who said that the hospital industry believes the real cost of the new Queensland Children's Hospital will eclipse \$2 billion after land resumptions, roadworks and necessary upgrades to satellite hospitals are factored in. Some \$2 billion later and all we have, and I quote from Dr Slaughter, 'is just a bad plan'. Some \$2 billion later we have a hospital built for purely political reasons. So thanks to Labor we have a payroll system that has wasted well over \$1 billion and a bad plan for children's health services that is effectively up to a \$2 billion waste.

One would have thought federal Labor should be saying sorry—putting its money in to say sorry for what Labor has wasted at enormous cost to Queenslanders, the health of Queenslanders and the jobs of Queenslanders. But, no! At a time when the Newman Queensland government is leading the country in injecting money into Queensland Health and our public hospital system, Wayne Swan has deserted the people of Queensland by pulling the plug on the state's health system. One can talk about statistics until the cows come home. I am reminded of the old story that statistics are like prisoners: you can torture them and in the end they will spill the beans. What we have heard from those opposite today is an attempt to actually squeeze statistics to deny the people of Queensland the health services that they so desperately need. The specifics of what Mr Swan has squeezed from the people of Queensland is that, when we look at the 2012-13 Commonwealth budget brought down in May 2012, Queensland's national health reform funding has been reduced by the federal Treasurer to the tune of \$63.3 million in the forthcoming financial year and the size of Wayne Swan's national health reform cuts increased to \$95 million in 2015-16, with total funding to be reduced by at least \$342 million over four years.

Adjustments to national health reform funding are due to the federal Treasurer's desperate attempt to balance the federal budget by tinkering with the figures. The Commonwealth is rebasing the population estimates for the 2011 census and using updated Australian Institute of Health and Welfare measures of growth in health costs. This sneaky reduction in national health reform funding by the federal Labor government is made worse as the federal government is taking an additional \$40 million reduction to the National Healthcare Special Purpose Payment in 2011-12. This is also caused by the Commonwealth rebasing the 2011 census population figures and using updated Australian Institute of Health and Welfare growth in health cost measures. Fortunately, we have a health minister who is going to take this federal Treasurer to task. Indeed, a number of states and territories, including Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, have identified concerns with the methodology used to recalculate the population estimates and it is likely the Victorian Minister for Health will initiate an agenda item for discussion at the next Standing Council on Health meeting on 9 November 2012. This move will be supported by Minister Springborg as he

is concerned about a situation where the federal Treasurer can seem to retrospectively cut millions of dollars out of the Queensland Health budget.

As if this was not bad enough, Treasurer Swan has also announced sneaky changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule to restrict eligibility to telehealth services to those patients for whom distance is the most significant barrier to accessing specialist care. In particular, patients living in outer metropolitan areas and major cities will no longer be eligible. This is outrageous in a decentralised state such as Queensland. And if the attacks on health in our public hospital system were not enough, not just public health was given a touch-up but private health as well. Treasurer Swan has announced two measures to reduce the cost of the private health insurance rebate by recalculating the indexation method and removing the rebate on the lifetime health cover loading component of private health insurance premiums. Such changes could have a potential impact in reducing private health insurance coverage and increasing demand on the public health system. I commend the motion to the House.