




Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 29 May 2012

CAIRNS BASE HOSPITAL, REDEVELOPMENT

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (9.50 pm): I am proud to have been part of a Labor government that delivered a redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital worth more than \$446.3 million. It has already delivered new radiation oncology services and an expanded ED and will deliver more benefits when completed in 2014.

For the past two weeks more than 100 workers have downed tools to highlight concerns they have over the safety of work on the site of the block C redevelopment. The project safety committee, consisting of management and the workers, has raised safety issues with project managers Abigroup. I have attended early-morning meetings with the workforce along with representatives from the ETU, CFMEU, BLF and other unions supporting the stop-work. Since the electrical workers subcontracted to Logan City Electrics have been off the job over safety concerns I have visited them as often as possible to help keep up morale. As of yesterday the boys were back at work to fix the existing safety issues and raise any new ones that have come to light through the safety committee.

There continues to be concern about Abigroup not providing a time frame for health and safety representative training, which is mandatory under the act within a three-month period after the request is made. It is clear that communication is still a major issue on the site. I have, however, made a point of speaking to representatives from Abigroup, as well as the unions, to ensure a better understanding of the issues and to offer any assistance I can to ensure the smooth running of the site. But I will always support workers who are raising genuine safety concerns. Every worker deserves to return safely home to their family each day.

As with all construction sites, there has been some friction between unions and management, and I am well aware that some has been related to the uncertainty over which firm would win the contract for the electrical component of the next stage, block D. It is my understanding that this contract has been awarded to John Goss constructions. There has been some concern over the wages and conditions that may eventuate under the new contractor. For example, there is a potential for a fourth-year electrical apprentice to earn over \$20,000 less per year, including site and tool allowances, than at other sites in Queensland.

This is not about demonising construction firms or subcontractors. The ongoing safety of workers on block C is a real concern, and unions have a decent relationship regarding safety on many other Abigroup sites across Queensland. The argument is simply that there should be no reason a different standard should apply in Cairns. It is about workers in Far North Queensland being treated the same as workers on the Gold Coast or in Brisbane. It is the same regarding wages.

I congratulate John Goss constructions on securing the contract for the next stage, block D, of the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment. With the likely scuttling of the \$155 million Cairns Entertainment Precinct project, construction work has all but dried up in our region, apart from the hospital redevelopment. The reality is that, given the size of the job, around 80 electrical workers are probably going to be needed for block D and there will be 20 to 25 workers coming off the Mount Sheridan Plaza redevelopment, as well as about 40 coming off the Lotus Glen expansion. The timing is right, and it will be up to the workers also to put their best foot forward and put in applications to the successful tenderer. Very importantly, John Goss constructions needs to know that there are local people who want the work on this job, and I support those workers all the way.