




Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND HEALTH LEGISLATION (HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.09 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate of and to support the Queensland Health and Hospitals Network and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. It is a positive time for the people of the Wide Bay, Bundaberg and Burnett areas. It is an exciting time now that we finally have progressive and vibrant legislation to continue to reshape Queensland, in particular Queensland Health. On behalf of my constituents, I congratulate the minister on tackling issues regarding Queensland Health head-on.

It is exciting because we on this side of the House are going to clean up the mess in Queensland Health. We are enthusiastic about repairing the legacy left by the former Labor government. A key commitment is to ensure that the people of Bundaberg, Burnett and Wide Bay have access to world-class health and hospital services including functional hospitals. In contrast with the previous government, the LNP is committed to effective investment in health and to principles of transparency and decision making that is decentralised. How long have we on our side of politics been calling for greater decentralisation and local decision making? Too long!

This legislation is part of a key commitment of the Newman government to return control of health services to local communities. Local health boards will give our local communities the capacity to run their own services in the Burnett and Wide Bay hospital network. By proposing to implement 17 local health boards, we are finally entrusting our local communities with the running of our health services in a transparent manner.

Locally in Wide Bay, the appointee to the local health board has extensive relevant leadership experience. The appointee will be accountable for the performance of the hospital and health board in delivering health services to national standards. Wide Bay is privileged to have a very experienced chair appointed, Mr Gary Kirk. Mr Kirk has almost 40 years experience in management and a great community service record, and he owns and operates a small business. This reform is a significant change for the health industry and will transform the way services in my electorate are governed. How refreshing to decentralise management and place greater trust in my community to run our own services, all while increasing transparency and confidence in health delivery.

The bill amends the Health and Hospitals Network Act 2011 to support the revised national health funding arrangements. These provisions are being enacted by all states, territories and the Commonwealth in a similar way. The bill also establishes funding arrangements to provide for the flow of funding from the Commonwealth and state governments directly to hospital and health services.

We have many examples of Labor's poor capacity to manage Queensland, especially with regard to health. Honourable members have to feel sorry for the many hardworking professionals and staff who

suffered under Labor. They would remember the proposal to chop Queensland Health into two, which would not have changed a thing. This was a panicked move and an act of desperation by a tired, 20-year-old Labor government. We can all remember the now infamous claims from Anna Bligh that she would work night and day to fix the Health payroll system, but doctors and nurses are still not getting paid the right amount. Labor had 20 years—over 7,000 days—to fix Queensland Health. The Bligh government's last biggest reform did not survive three months.

We have also experienced the \$16.6 million health fraud under Labor. You just cannot trust Labor to manage our health system. The LNP knows that we need to return the control and delivery of health services to the great front-line staff through local health boards. This bill will support rural and regional hospitals and health services. From 1 July 2012 it is proposed that each hospital and health service will have its own bank account into which Commonwealth and state funding for public hospital and health services will be deposited.

It is with some reluctance that I raise the issues surrounding Bundaberg Hospital that ultimately led to the need for Queensland Health reform. My reluctance stems from the reminder of the hurt and pain felt by the many families in my electorate affected by poor health practices. It has been reported widely that public hospitals are often lacking in humanity, costing more and doing less and run by executive staff with minimal clinical knowledge. The Bundaberg Hospital scandal, which affected many in my electorate, was a symptom of the problems facing the health system, and we look forward to the underlying causes being addressed and real change coming about. The obsession with punishing Dr Jayant Patel, instead of managing the system that sponsored him, seems likely to ensure that when the dust has finally settled and the boards are functioning effectively confidence will return.

Current problems in hospitals reflect the focus on bottom-line outcomes. That managerial style produced staff and bed shortages, long waiting lists and excessive bed usage. It concentrates on business plans and targets and on negative short-term financial objectives, producing negative economic activity—and we all remember Labor's health minister Mr Nuttall. Good systems like hospital boards are designed deliberately to produce high-quality work. By eliminating waste, delay and the need to redo substandard work, they achieve long-term cost-effectiveness. The people now empowered to control the running of our hospitals will behave more like coaches than controllers or judges. Those people are empowered to deal with issues like waiting lists and ambulance ramping.

The Bundaberg scandal has undermined the public's trust in hospitals and doctors. While it revolves around Dr Jayant Patel, it is a symptom of an affliction affecting health care Queensland-wide. The tragedies exposed in Bundaberg could have been avoided. The issues of Patel's performance at Bundaberg Hospital did not emerge from a good governance system but from concerns of individual doctors and nurses about his surgical performance. It was a letter from nursing staff that led to the Morris inquiry which, it was hoped, would shed light on Patel's appointment to Bundaberg Hospital; the role of the Queensland Medical Board in assessing, registering and monitoring overseas trained doctors; the role of federal, state and territory governments and the clinical colleges in these processes; systems to ensure accountability and monitoring of appropriate performance of individuals and clinical services; and systems to receive, process and resolve complaints about clinical performance or services.

The responsibility for the impoverishment and failings of the Queensland health system lies squarely with those Labor members opposite, the self-proclaimed 'magnificent seven'. It is time for local hospital boards, and the LNP is committed to dragging Queensland Health into the 21st century. This will, in turn, lead to improvements in patient care, community involvement and confidence in these critical services. I commend the bill to the House.