




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

MOTION: HEALTH, COMMONWEALTH FUNDING

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.11 pm): The opposition will be opposing the motion moved by the health minister. The health minister's claims of cuts to health funding by the federal government are just more mean and tricky politics to hide his cuts to services. There is no cut to funding per Queenslanders. The minister is cherry picking figures in just another smokescreen to hide behind the facts.

The 2012-13 budget update released by the Commonwealth confirmed that funding for Health in Queensland will increase by 21 per cent over the next four years. In contrast the LNP is only increasing health spending by 12.9 per cent. So the federal government is increasing health funding by more than eight per cent more than the state government. The average annual increase in health funding from the Commonwealth government is 6.95 per cent compared with 4.3 per cent from the state government. The Commonwealth is providing health funding to Queensland of \$13.53 billion over the next four years, with the annual payment increasing by \$650 million over this time. Nobody can take anything this health minister says seriously any more. He just puts out more spin to hide his incompetence.

Further to the health minister's incorrect comments on federal health funding, the Treasurer today during question time also made a statement that overall Queensland had lost federal funding—this is wrong. Overall the Commonwealth's Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook leaves Queensland coming out in the black with additional funding of \$246 million. National Partnership payments increase overall by \$303.9 per cent, more than offsetting a downward revision of GST revenue of \$57.6 million. In total, Queensland is receiving National Partnership payments of \$2.3 billion this financial year. So, despite the LNP government failing to meet obligations under a number of national cost-sharing programs, the federal Labor government continues to meet its obligations to the state.

Just like today's stunt about the federal funding, the health minister also uses his one-trick pony act to roll out the Health payroll when this government finds itself in a bind. The truth about the Health payroll was revealed during the estimates committee hearings a couple of weeks ago. The director-general, Dr O'Connell, advised that he had paraphrased for the minister previous legal advice on this matter and that the minister had obtained documents related to the original contract from the Department of Public Works. The health minister acknowledged that he and the Crown Solicitor did have access to this two-year-old legal advice and associated cabinet documents but it remained unclear whether he had made the effort to review these documents. This is despite the health minister having access to these documents for almost three months. The minister's continual assertion that he did not have access to the documents in question was at odds with the facts presented to the committee.

The Auditor-General is doing his annual financial audit of Queensland Health and in that he will look at the issues of the payroll. I also note that, pursuant to section 4.15.6 of the Queensland Cabinet Handbook, the Auditor-General when conducting an investigation under the Auditor-General Act 2009 is conferred with the authority to access the cabinet documents of previous governments. We hear the one-trick pony, the health minister, saying that he provided cabinet documents to the then Premier. Those documents were in relation to CMC investigations or Auditor-General investigations. Therefore, the

Auditor-General has access to cabinet documents. So, if any further scrutiny is required of these documents, the appropriate auditor—the Auditor-General—has access to them.

But what is this stunt by the LNP really about? It is a diversion. It is obvious that this is a distraction. Every time the LNP back themselves into a corner, the health minister, the one-trick pony, brings out the Health payroll as an attempt to divert the media and public attention away from the latest scandal the LNP is embroiled in. As the latest diversion is before the Ethics Committee, unfortunately we cannot comment further on the Premier dragging his feet on this issue, burying his head in the sand and hoping it will go away. The Minister for Health was quick to go to the Queensland police to make a complaint against Nuttall. Why didn't he go to the police and make a complaint against the director-general of the Department of Transport and Main Roads?

So unfortunately, as I said, we cannot comment on the real reason for today's diversion. But there are plenty of other disgraces this LNP government is diverting attention away from. This is a government that has shown very, very quickly that it has no regard for the basic needs of our community and it certainly has no intention of living up to the high expectations Queensland had when it elected the Newman government. This is a government that has willingly sacked more than 14,000 people, many in regional Queensland which will have drastic consequences for regional communities and economies. This is a government that has launched a full-scale attack on community groups, on front-line services and on organisations that look after the needy and the underprivileged. This is a government that is kicking residents out of caravan parks they have called home in many cases for decades. This is a government that has now set its sights on some of our most vulnerable citizens, the elderly and frail.

The health minister has a hide to talk about cuts to health funding when his government has slashed and burned across Queensland Health like nothing seen before. The LNP government etched its name in history as it ripped the heart out of the Queensland health system by slashing more than 2,700 jobs and axing services in a bid to cripple the state-wide system. In September, the disgraceful and merciless axing of health jobs and services told the real story of the Premier and his health minister, who had no intention of keeping their promise not to slash front-line services, including nurses and doctors and other critical health workers.

The Premier and his health minister have ripped the heart out of front-line health services across Queensland. You do not sack more than 2,700 people—including more than 1,500 people from hospitals and health services—without sacking front-line staff including nurses and doctors. This is a simple fact. We know that 130 jobs at Townsville Hospital have gone, including 45 nursing positions. Just last week we heard that 30 positions at the Mackay Base Hospital are going, including 15 nursing positions.

What the health minister has failed to acknowledge in his sackings is that those 2,750 staff are on top of the 3,000 fixed term appointments and casual positions that were terminated in June this year. Hundreds of other jobs were also lost in the community sector when the government closed grant funded projects and funding to non-government organisations. So that is almost 6,000 health workers on the unemployment queue in this wholesale axe through the heart of our state's health system.

The LNP government has now declared war on the people of Queensland through this wholesale axing of the health system. Queenslanders should now be under no illusions and make no mistake: the Premier is the front-line commander-in-chief of a heartless government that has declared war on the ordinary people of Queensland in every suburb, every town and every city across the state. The Premier should be ashamed of the diversionary tactics his government is using in a desperate attempt to keep his head above water.

Today we heard revelations about another departmental liaison officer in the transport minister's office and the transport minister's answer today about the physical location of the DLO and whether the officer was located in his office. The transport minister confirmed that the officer was located in his office. This is in direct contradiction to the director-general's answers during the estimates process about the physical location of DLOs. He said they were located in the department, not in the minister's office. The minister had the opportunity then to correct the record but he did not. Every day we are seeing the plot thicken on this story, as the government continues to weave a more and more intricate story to attempt to avoid scrutiny.

Today during question time we saw the Premier and his minister desperately try to talk about their integrity and accountability credentials. What a joke! In trying to prove how open and accountable this government is, the Premier resorted to spruiking the fact that he is paying the Leader of the House more money. So a pay rise and a title promotion for the member for Mermaid Beach constitutes integrity and accountability? Give me a break. This is a man who cannot pay a restaurant bill. The Premier's desperation in question time today to try to clear the air of the stench that is hanging over his government was pathetic and a depressing display for the people of Queensland. I know people will see this latest attempt at trickery for what it really is—a diversion away from the stench of cover-ups that surrounds this government.

(Time expired)