




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Thursday, 15 November 2012

MINISTER FOR HEALTH; NEWMAN GOVERNMENT, PERFORMANCE

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.11 pm): This morning during question time we saw another extraordinary performance by the member for Southern Downs, the health minister—the Premier in waiting. The health minister tabled apparently scandalous documents that were supposed to prove that the Labor government planned the widespread closure of nursing homes. However, he did not provide one signed document to prove his case because they do not exist. The fact is that the health minister is the one who is throwing the lives of elderly Queenslanders and their families into chaos by closing nursing-home beds. The minister cannot spin his way out of this one or try to blame the former government. It is time for him to be accountable for the callous decisions he has made.

But instead of being accountable, the LNP government has done the opposite and has legislated and enshrined in law greater secrecy in Queensland. For example, the Local Government Amendment Act 2012 is a free pass for the Lord Mayor, the Premier's mate in City Hall, to run a more secretive and unaccountable council. The new law explicitly prevents opposition councillors from requesting information about matters outside their own wards. This means that major projects like Legacy Way will not be able to be properly scrutinised if they fall within wards represented by LNP councillors. It should be a basic right for councillors to obtain information about matters in any council area. That right remains for every other council in Queensland. Why has Brisbane City Council been singled out? It is because it is the only elected LNP council in Queensland.

The tricky nature of this new legislation, which we opposed, is that these restrictions do not apply to the Lord Mayor or to chairs of committees. It is a law designed only to prevent proper scrutiny by the Labor opposition councillors. It makes it harder to determine just how much of a burden the Legacy Way toll tunnel will be on ratepayers. The disappointing list of new secretive measures also means that major decisions affecting ratepayers that would usually be subject to debate by a full council can be delegated to the Establishment and Coordination Committee, which is made up entirely of the Lord Mayor and LNP councillors. Councillors will even be able to draw two pay packets—their council salary and also a full-time public servant salary. The requirement for councillors to report another councillor's conflict of interest has been removed.

The LNP talk about accountability and transparency, but they deliver the opposite. Just look at how these changes were brought in. There was no attempt at real consultation, and then the minister ignored the recommendations of its own stacked committee. The government denied the council Leader of the Opposition, Milton Dick, a chance to speak at the public hearing. They also ignored Councillor Dick's substantial submission on the sweeping changes that were made to the City of Brisbane Act. It seems that the minister believes that consultation involves just a phone call to his LNP mates on council. Unfortunately, I am not surprised by this behaviour because it simply reflects the low standards of LNP ministers and the low standards that the Premier sets for his government.