




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR INALA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Daniel Morcombe; Queensland Health, Employment Contracts

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.00 am): Today I want to pay tribute to the courage, the dignity and the determination of Bruce and Denise Morcombe. This couple and their family lived through every parent's nightmare. They spent a decade experiencing the worst kind of sadness and desolation—not knowing what had become of their cherished son Daniel when he disappeared. As they grieved, Queensland grieved with them. As they tried to find their way through the devastation and the mystery of Daniel's disappearance, Queensland shared their pain. But, in the glare of publicity as Queensland police undertook the most extensive investigation in history, they refused to let Daniel's memory fade.

They established the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, which has seen tens of thousands of school kids learn how to protect themselves. In providing valuable life lessons through the foundation, they no doubt have helped prevent attacks against children and provided a generation of Australian children with an invaluable education on how to keep themselves safe. As the man who committed this horrific crime and took Daniel from his family begins his prison sentence, I, like all Queenslanders, and I believe all members of this House, hope that Bruce and Denise Morcombe, their family and their children find some solace.

On another note, on behalf of the opposition, I would also like to extend our deepest sympathies to Dr Chris Davis and his family. We heard about the tragedy last night. It has deeply shocked all of us on the opposition side, at it has everyone throughout the whole parliament. Our thoughts and prayers are with their family as they go through this time.

Today I want to talk about the doctors crisis that is engulfing this government. The health minister stood in this place not more than an hour ago and talked about all the issues that he was now finally addressing in relation to this dispute. He thanked senior medical officers very personally for the leadership they provide. There is no thanks for the leadership that this government has provided. In fact, the health minister and the Premier have been found wanting in terms of any resemblance of leadership to resolve this crisis.

The opposition first raised this issue over 130 days ago, when we raised the issue of the contract here in this parliament and asked the minister and the government what they were doing about this contract. And we got silence—absolute silence. We have seen the situation arise over the last couple of months where the public are deeply, deeply concerned about the crisis that is engulfing our public health system. What has been the response from this government? The response has been for the health minister to hide his head in the sand and do absolutely nothing—do absolutely nothing about a crisis that could have been avoided. How could it have been avoided? By (a) leadership and (b) listening—listening to doctors.

Who can remember the Premier's famous words after the Redcliffe by-election, after the 17 per cent swing against the LNP government? 'I have heard the message and I will now listen to

Queenslanders.' Well it is a bit hard to listen when you are overseas. But he has come back and once again has failed to take any action, failed to provide the leadership that this state so rightly deserves. And what has the health minister been doing over this period of time? Well, we do not know because there has been silence from the health minister. But today's performance was the worst performance I have ever seen in this House from a health minister—a complete and utter disgrace. Very simple questions were put to the health minister and let me recap in detail for everybody.

One of the questions was: would he table the new contracts he was going to present to the doctors? What answer did we get? No, absolutely not. The health minister refuses to table the new contracts so that doctors and the public can sight these contracts in full. So he failed on that occasion. Then we asked another very simple question. We tried to make these questions very simple for the health minister today, hoping that he could comprehend these questions and that he would be able to answer these questions. The next question was along the lines of: how many specialist doctors have signed the contracts that have been personally delivered to them? Did we get an answer? No. Once again, there was complete silence—the minister failing to know very simple facts about this health crisis.

The next question was: how many specialists have resigned from the regions? Did we get an answer to that question? It was a very serious question because we are hearing that doctors are going from the Gold Coast and from Townsville. That is going to have a huge impact. We have seen reports that in Atherton I think, member for Mulgrave, five doctors—

Mr Pitt: Three.

Ms PALASZCZUK:—three doctors were considering leaving up there. The impact of these doctors leaving regional areas will be felt right across the state. We know that once you attract people to the regions they tend to raise their families there and, if they leave the regions and go interstate or overseas, they are going to be hard to replace. So did the minister answer that question? No. He failed dismally.

Then the member for Bundamba, the shadow health minister, raised another very important question about the secret black list of names that the minister will not release. Once again, he failed to release it. The allegations were: can the minister advise the House whether any of those names on that secret black list are names of either previous or current donors to the LNP or whether any of those people have been a candidate for the LNP? They are very simple questions. What is this government hiding from? Why are you hiding and why are you refusing to answer any of these questions?

So after what we have seen over the 130 days that have passed, this minister, who could have solved the issue from day one if he had (a) listened and (b) sat down with doctors and listened to their concerns, suddenly at the eleventh hour has been painted as this knight in shining armour who is coming in to save the day. I am sorry but this is a health minister who created this mess and who is now mopping up his own mess. He is no white knight in shining armour. This is a minister who now has to fix up the mess he has created. It is a last minute deal, and Queenslanders have every right to ask: how did it get to this? How did it get to this situation where there is expected to be over 1,000 doctors at the Brisbane convention centre tomorrow night who are threatening to walk away from the public hospital system? These doctors do not want to walk away from the public health system. They want to continue working in the public hospital system.

Mr Pitt: They feel they have no other choice.

Ms PALASZCZUK: That is right. They feel they have no other choice but to take the action that they are thinking about taking because this government is so arrogant that it will not listen to their concerns.

The only resolution here is for this health minister to be sacked. The Premier needs to show leadership and it is about time that he sacked this incompetent health minister, had a reshuffle, got rid of the dead wood, moved some people from the back bench who might be a bit more competent than the health minister and actually took some decisive action in resolving this issue.

We heard the health minister today talk about how he is now going to address the issues of fatigue, unfair dismissal and the collective agreements: he is going to put in place a ministerial directive and he is going to create new contracts. That is the biggest backflip I have ever seen.

These are the issues that we have been raising time and time again and that doctors have been raising time and time again in the media, and this arrogant, know-it-all, incompetent, bungling health minister who could not answer a single question in the House today should do the right thing and resign. He does not deserve to be in the position of health minister. It was the worst performance from a health minister that I have ever seen in my time in this House. He failed to answer any

questions. Guess what? Being a minister requires hard work. It does not require sitting behind a desk in Charlotte Street but getting out there and meeting with doctors and listening to people on the ground to avert a crisis where doctors are thinking of walking out of our public health system. Every member in this House should be thinking, 'How did it come to this?' If this health minister had any shred of decency or integrity, he would offer his resignation letter to the Premier today and let someone who is competent take over and do the job that is meant to be about preserving our public hospital system in this state.