




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Record of Proceedings, 20 March 2014

MOTION: AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.37 am): I rise to support the amendment moved by the shadow health minister, which is the insertion of paragraph 3—

notes the Premier and Health Minister's failure to resolve the recommendations of the Auditor-General's reports and the doctors' contract debacle in the public interest.

Last night over 1,000 Queensland doctors attended a meeting at which they voted against the proposal put by this Minister for Health. Let us go back in time. Over 140 days ago we first raised in this parliament the issue of the individual contracts that this government wanted to place doctors on. For 140 days this incompetent health minister has sat on his hands. He has hardly lifted a finger to try and resolve this issue. Let there be no mistake: this doctors crisis, this doctors debacle, is of this health minister's own making. It did not suddenly arise out of thin air. It was not created in some part of this state. This is the minister's own debacle. For this debacle, which has gone on for 140 days, this minister should be pushed aside and this minister should be sacked.

Mr Nicholls: Did you apply that standard to Paul Lucas?

Ms PALASZCZUK: This is the most incompetent minister that we have ever seen in this state.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I say to the Treasurer of the state: over 1,000 Queensland doctors attended a meeting last night, as did the assistant health minister. Over 1,000 doctors attended. In question time today I listened to the Premier talking about patient care and, yes, I believe patient care should be at the forefront of any decision that this government makes. Who do I trust: do I trust 1,000 health specialists in this state, or do I trust this LNP government? Who can Queensland trust? I know who Queensland can trust: it is the doctors of this state, because it is the doctors who are committed to our public health system. It is our doctors and our specialists who are there at all hours of the night and during the weekends to ensure that Queensland families get the best possible care that they deserve from our public health system.

What has this government done? This government has done everything it possibly can to ostracise doctors in this state. Queenslanders should be aghast—aghast at the fact that over 1,000 specialists are so concerned that they had a mass rally to talk about these contracts that the government cannot finalise. I am talking about over 1,000 specialist doctors, and I understand that the issues raised last night were from cardiologists, from doctors from Atherton, and Cairns Hospital specialists. There were specialist doctors from the emergency departments, and the shadow health minister talked about the issue where, in particular, neurosurgeons could leave en masse and leave our state. I do not know what everyone else in this House thinks, but if a close relative of mine or anyone in my electorate suddenly goes into cardiac arrest they would want the best possible care in our hospital system. How does this government treat our specialists in this state? It treats our specialists in this state with disdain, with disrespect and with no dignity. That is shameful and this

should not be the situation that we have been placed in. Who has put us in this situation? The person who is responsible is this incompetent health minister.

I now turn my attention to the Premier, because the amendment addresses the Premier as well. The Premier has been on an overseas trade mission to the US. As I clearly asked the Premier today, how many times has he sat down with the medical specialists since he has come back to this state to try to resolve this issue? Did we get an answer?

Mr Mulherin: No!

Ms PALASZCZUK: No answer. No answer from the Premier about—

Mr Mulherin: It's because he doesn't care.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I take that interjection; he simply does not care, because a Premier of this state would show leadership. A Premier of this state would have stayed up all night, would have dragged the health minister into the Premier's office, got the department heads around the table and said, 'This needs to be resolved.' We have cabinet ministers sitting in this House. What are they thinking? What are they thinking when they see the images on the news tonight of over 1,000 health specialists in this state expressing no confidence in this government in relation to its contracts? This incompetent health minister stood here in this parliament the other day after we tried to drag out what the amendments were to the contracts and tabled these contracts and said—

As you are aware, I have put forward a range of solutions that I believe to go a long way to addressing the matters you and your representatives have raised in relation to your key concerns around the implementation of the contract.

What did he want to do? He wanted to amend the Hospital and Health Boards Act and he wanted to offer a Health employment directive. Last night the specialists rejected this so-called solution. This so-called solution is now null and void and it is back to the drawing board. How can this government fix this crisis? How can it fix this crisis? It can amend the Industrial Relations Act.

Let us talk about what these specialist doctors are concerned about. Firstly, they are concerned about fatigue provisions. If you are working all night, you are entitled to have a break if you are a specialist carrying out operations in this state. Secondly, they do not want to be unfairly dismissed for raising issues that they think are in the public interest. Every specialist in this state should have the clear ability—

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I know the doctors have been talking to these LNP members and at the next election all of the doctors and all of the people in this state can make a clear choice: do they trust Labor to stand up for doctors in this state or do they trust the LNP? I know what the public is going to say, 'It should never have come to this.' It should never have come to this because you cannot trust this government. You cannot trust this government. It has done nothing to try to find a resolution.

I go back to the Premier's words—those very clear words from the Redcliffe by-election after the 17 per cent swing. The Premier said, 'I will listen. I will listen.' Have the Premier and the health minister listened to doctors? No, they have not. Now we have the unbelievable situation in this state where our specialists are contemplating mass resignations. What will that mean? The Premier's arrogance today was essentially, 'Let them go. Let them go. We will advertise and get more in here.' These are experienced specialists. These are experienced specialists who are working in our public health system. If they go, this government's plan is to advertise overseas and get in overseas trained doctors. We want our specialists to stay here. We value our specialists working in Cairns, in Townsville, in Rockhampton, in Bundaberg, in Longreach, in Emerald and right across this state because we believe that Queenslanders deserve the best public health system that Queensland can offer. We do not believe in attacking the dignity of our specialists, let alone our nurses, our wardsmen and everybody who helps make our public health system what it is. That is why Labor invested in expanding our public health system across the state. That is why we built the Gold Coast University Hospital. We are expanding the Cairns Hospital—

Honourable members interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms PALASZCZUK: This government sacks; we build. That is very clear.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Pause the clock. I can hear an exchange between members on my left and in the centre. I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I never thought that this week we would still be here talking about the doctors crisis that is engulfing our state. Any reasonable person would have expected a health

minister and a Premier to come together and sort it out. But have we seen that? No, we have not because—

Mr Pitt: No leadership!

Ms PALASZCZUK:—there is no leadership and this government is so arrogant it cannot even listen to doctors who have concerns. It is not even prepared to listen to the concerns that doctors have about these specific contracts.

The time for resolution has come. I do not want to see a situation where cardiologists, neurosurgeons and our emergency doctors leave our state and go elsewhere, because they will not return. They will not return. If they move their families interstate or overseas, they will not come back and we will lose those experienced doctors who are needed to run our public health system. I think it says a lot about how this government treats our public health system when it cannot even treat our specialists with respect. I heard the Premier talking about how much the specialists get paid. If anyone in this House suddenly goes into cardiac arrest, I want the most experienced person to be able to look after that person, to make sure that they have quality of life and can be saved.

These are serious issues that every member of this House and every Queenslanders has a right to be concerned about. When they see those images on the six o'clock news tonight, the families are going to be aghast that this arrogant LNP government has once again failed to offer any hand of resolution, any offer to sit down and resolve this crisis. Are there any meetings happening today? Most importantly, we even had the assistant health minister address the meeting last night—their own assistant health minister attended the meeting last night—and agreed with the doctors. There is no more telling sign than when their own specialist cannot support the minister's handling of these contracts.

Finally, I want to address the issues of the Auditor-General's report. The opposition supports the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report. However, I want to draw attention to a couple of issues. Those issues about the key findings relate to some billing practices of SMOs and the fact that there were, I think in one instance, seven SMOs who appeared to be at work during their rostered hours for more than 30 days and another eight SMOs who were treating private patients in public hospitals but not declaring the income as they were contractually required to do so. This week, we raised this issue in parliament as well. We believe that this minister is also trying to smear the name of all SMOs in this state. If the minister were open and transparent, he would name those SMOs so that every other SMO could have their name cleared. If action needs to be taken, action can be taken against those few. If those people are found to have done the wrong thing, they should face the full force of the law.

We also need the government to tell us whether any of those SMOs whose names have been deleted from that black list—the government is not forthcoming with those names—have either been a donor to the LNP or have ever been a candidate for the LNP. It is a legitimate question and we want a legitimate answer. It is a secret list. Be under no mistake: it is a black list. They have never answered the question. Print those names and clear every other SMO in this state. Stop smearing thousands of senior medical officers when it has been found that fewer than 20 are alleged to have done the wrong thing. This has been the whole dirty tactic from a one-trick pony, the health minister, who cannot stand on his own two feet and talk about the mess of his own making, who wants to go back and talk about the past when he cannot even deal with the present.

The handling of this debacle, this doctors crisis, has been an unmitigated disaster from beginning to end. It has been absolutely disgraceful. It is about time this health minister hangs his head in shame. It is about time the Premier showed some leadership and moved him aside and got someone in who can fix this crisis and treat those specialists in our state with the absolute respect that they deserve.