




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Health

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.03 am): This is a government that was voted in to focus on front-line services, and we have seen 4,500 jobs axed under the Health portfolio. Queenslanders should be very concerned about that fact, because a reduction in health service staff will result in a reduction of service—no ifs, no buts, no maybes. As I travel across Queensland, Queenslanders are telling me that they are seeing the impact of these job cuts to the quality of services being delivered. I want to pay tribute to health workers right across Queensland and thank them for the hard work that they do day in and day out, working hard for Queenslanders to make sure that they get the care that they deserve.

What we have seen today from this government is extraordinary. What we have heard from this health minister today is a failure to answer fundamental questions not just in this House, but to the Queensland public. What has been revealed over the last day is that two senior executives have been stood down from Metro North Hospital and Health Service, and now we hear that allegations of corruption have been referred to the CCC. This House and the people of Queensland want to know what the allegations of corruption are. Do they involve the awarding of tender contracts? Do they involve jobs for the boys? There is nothing more fundamental than an open and transparent government, and that is what Labor will put in place if we are elected because this government is failing the test. This minister is failing to accept responsibility. The cabinet ministers over there are laughing, but this is no laughing matter. Queenslanders deserve better!

This is a health minister under pressure who, for six months, was at the helm of a doctors crisis created by him. This is a government which is still arrogant and still not listening. It is now covering up and not telling the truth to Queenslanders about why these two people have been stood down. Why will the health minister not face the music? This morning on 4BC radio we heard him say that it could be something to do with an employment contract or procurement. Then on Steve Austin he said, 'Yes, it is employment and procurement.' Well, what are the issues? Is there a culture of jobs for the boys operating? We know what happened to Michael Caltabiano, who was hand picked by the Premier.

Let us talk about the fundamental issue. This matter is now being referred to the CCC. Who is in charge of the CCC? Who is in charge of what is supposed to be the independent anticorruption watchdog in this state? Queenslanders know who is in control, and it is the man who was hand picked by this government. It is not bipartisan, it is not independent and Queenslanders want what the Premier said he would deliver after the Stafford by-election. After the Stafford by-election the Premier very clearly said that the chair of the CCC would have bipartisan support. This chair does not have bipartisan support. We now have a matter referred by the Health department to the CCC, and this is Caesar judging Caesar.

The revelations we have seen in Rockhampton deserve the attention of this House and they deserve the attention of this incompetent, bungling health minister. There have been 33 serious

incidents and 18 unexpected deaths in the Rockhampton hospital. One unexpected death is one too many. I pay tribute to the member for Rockhampton, who is standing up for his community. The member for Rockhampton asked the very simple question of the Premier, 'Will there be an independent inquiry?' What could be simpler than that? What did this Premier say? He fudged the question, waffled, moved on and said absolutely nothing. It is no laughing matter for the people of Rockhampton, and we need to make sure that there is a full independent inquiry to find out what is going wrong.

Through the Queensland Nurses Union right to information, we do know that there have been massive job cuts throughout regions right across the state. I was in Bundaberg the other day, and people at the hospital told me that there have been massive cuts to nursing staff. It is having an impact. I am speaking to nurses and doctors right across the state that are under pressure because they are now doing the job of up to two or three people. They tell me that they are working longer shifts and working harder than ever before because they want to deliver a quality health system to the people of Queensland.

Who does the buck stop with? It stops with this arrogant and out-of-touch government, with the Premier and with the health minister. What we have seen are revelations in the full diary that was perhaps accidentally or maybe even intentionally put up on the Premier's department website. Within 15 minutes of me conducting a press conference it disappeared. It was taken down—hidden from sight for no-one else to realise.

If this is about openness and transparency, we have here the full diaries. What does this record show us? It shows us that this health minister is more concerned with LNP fundraisers—up to seven LNP fundraisers in one month. This is a man who is supposed to be running the Health budget. This is a man who is more interested in fundraising than he is focused on delivering front-line services. This is a man who stood by and did nothing for six months while there was a doctors crisis. The government was bleeding yet he treated the doctors with total and utter contempt. Now he has moved on to the nurses. The government is running an advertising campaign in relation to that. Do Queenslanders know how much money is being spent on that? No, they do not, because there is a culture of cover-up in this government.

Time and time again we come into this House asking fundamental, basic questions. Do we get answers? No, we do not. This is the people's house. We are elected by the people in our electorates to come here and ask the government the questions of the day, and we get nothing. When those opposite refuse to answer our questions, they are refusing the people of Queensland.

What we have seen today from this health minister is a fundamental failure to answer a simple question: what are the details of the allegations of corruption that have been referred to the CCC? How can you ask a more fundamental question and not get an answer? What does this minister do? He trawls back through the past. The minister has been the health minister for 2½ years. This has occurred on his watch and now he needs to take responsibility.

We need a full, independent inquiry into what is happening in Rockhampton. We need to know—and the public deserves to know—the details of the allegations that have been referred to the CCC. I am quite sure that the media will be asking these questions today also, because Queenslanders deserve to know. What is the situation around tender processes? We know that there have been issues in the Attorney-General's portfolio in relation to boot camps. Is there a culture—a pattern of behaviour in terms of the probity of this government and ministers around the awarding of government contracts? If there are employment issues, is this a matter of jobs for the boys? The public deserves to know and it deserves to have these answers today.

This is a government that is hiding. This is a government that is covering up. This is a government that is afraid to face the facts. This is a government that is afraid to face the music. Queenslanders deserve better than this. Queenslanders deserve a government that is prepared to listen and a government that is prepared to act. They deserve a fully independent chair of the CCC that will investigate matters free from political influence.

(Time expired)