




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (11.36 am): I begin my contribution to this debate by acknowledging, by thanking and by paying tribute to the people of the Woodridge electorate, a community I feel so very privileged to represent in this parliament. I speak in support of this motion of confidence sure in the knowledge that the people of Woodridge are resolute and certain in their support of the Palaszczuk Labor government. The citizens of Woodridge voted in overwhelming numbers at the state election held on 31 January this year to consign the Newman LNP government to history. On election day, the Woodridge electorate expressed its overwhelming confidence in the Australian Labor Party. They did so because they had felt the full force of cuts to front-line jobs and services. They had felt the full force of cuts to employment and training programs like Skilling Queenslanders for Work. In this debate, as in all things I do and will do as a member of parliament and as Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, the people of Woodridge remain uppermost in my mind.

On a day like today it is worth reflecting on the primacy of parliament. In 1891 as shearers and bush workers, many of whom went on to form the Australian Workers Union, gathered around the tree of knowledge in Barcaldine, those workers collectively came to a view—a view that is found in the DNA of the Australian Labor Party to this day—that economic, social, political and industrial justice can only be delivered through parliamentary means. Almost 125 years ago those Queenslanders formed the view that a more peaceful, just and equal world could only be created by organising and electing Labor members of parliament—members of parliament who would commit to implementing a Labor platform and program once in power. Creating that better world can only be achieved by the formation of Labor governments—Labor governments like the one we are here today to sanction, Labor governments that will implement reforms that will help make Queensland a fairer and more prosperous place. What was true 125 years ago remains true today. On a day like today it is worth remembering that this inbuilt respect for parliamentary democracy and for the institution of parliament itself, its processes, its privileges and its duties, sits at the core of our Labor tradition.

In this debate all honourable members have to decide whether or not to support the Palaszczuk Labor government. To help them answer that question, can I ask honourable members to consider Labor's detailed and comprehensive plans for Health. Those members opposite have called for a plan. Mr Speaker, I am about to deliver Labor's plan for Health. As Minister for Health I am committed to working with my department and hospital and health services across the state to bring integrity and accountability back into our state's health system. I am committed to restoring front-line services and ensuring that the safety of patients and quality of care are part of everyday decisions made in the health system. Labor will refocus our health system on patient safety to ensure that quality care is driven by professional commitment, not short-term targets and expensive television advertising. Labor will start to rebuild our nursing, midwifery and allied health workforce through programs designed to ensure both new graduates and experienced practitioners are recruited where they are needed most. Labor will also address unfair and unsafe workloads for nurses and midwives.

But there is more to Health than just hospitals, and that is why the Palaszczuk Labor government is focusing on keeping Queenslanders healthy so they do not have to visit a hospital. That is in stark contrast to those opposite, who gutted the health system by cutting millions of dollars out of preventative health programs and by shutting down community services. We will start rebuilding our health system by reinvesting in preventative health programs, health promotion and research and innovation. This is about driving positive health outcomes, easing pressure on the entire health system and improving the quality of life for all Queenslanders.

I want to say a few things about Labor's significant election commitments relating to nursing. There is strong international and local research which shows that mandating the ratio of nurses to patients improves the quality of care and provides greater patient satisfaction and better patient outcomes. This evidence indicates reduced readmission rates and reduced post-operative mortality rates. Everywhere I go I hear from nurses and health staff that they have been stretched too thin by the cuts made by the LNP. That is why we will introduce legislation in this term for safe nurse-to-patient ratios and workload provisions to ensure patient safety and quality care. We are funding our hospital and health services to recruit an additional 400 nursing positions, at a cost of \$110 million, to rebuild services cut back by the Newman government. Through our nursing and midwifery graduate program, we will support up to 4,000 new graduate nurse places in our public teaching hospitals over the next four years. Each year up to 1,000 new graduate nurses will be employed by our hospital and health services and provided with formalised transition to practice programs by their employers. This is about reinvigorating the nursing and midwifery workforce for Queensland by ensuring employment opportunities for our best and brightest nursing graduates.

As part of our commitment to increasing transparency about health system performance, hospital and health services will be required to monitor and publicly report on compliance with safe nurse-to-patient ratios. We will start by restoring the system-wide functions that were lost with the closure of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission and the axing by the LNP government and the former Minister for Health—now the Leader of the Opposition—of 80 positions from the Patient Safety Centre. Patient safety and quality improvement will be properly included and funded as key performance indicators in hospital and health service agreements. We want Queenslanders to have a say in how their services are delivered. That is why we will establish a service agreement with Health Consumers Queensland to independently advocate for patients and their families and to empower health consumers in planning, designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating hospital and health services.

As I have said, Mr Speaker, there is more to the Health portfolio than hospitals. Our plan is to invest in preventative health to encourage Queenslanders to stay healthy and out of the hospital system. Population and preventative health initiatives help drive down social health costs and improve quality of life in the community. We will do that by re-establishing and expanding the school aged health service for primary school aged students. We will work in partnership with the community to promote and support healthy lifestyles. We will work in partnership with local government to reduce smoking rates and the problem of passive smoking, and we will update strategies to increase consumption of Queensland's great fresh fruit and vegetable produce. Our approach will make sure that healthy choices are easier choices and that services are available to people who need added support.

As I said, in this debate all honourable members have a choice whether to support the Palaszczuk Labor government or not. Having set out some of Labor's policies and plans for Health, let me compare that with the legacy of the last three years of LNP administration of this state. In my portfolio area of Health and ambulance services, what was it that characterised the last three years of LNP rule in Queensland? LNP cuts over the past three years included 4,820 positions in the health system, including nearly 1,800 nurses and midwives as well as 700 allied health positions. More than 4,500 staff were gutted from the health system. More than 1,800 nurses and midwives were taken out of the health system in Queensland. Health promotion systems, prevention programs, aged care and community health programs were amongst the worst hit by the callous and arrogant LNP government. Eighty out of 120 positions in the Queensland Health Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Service were axed while the Leader of the Opposition presided as the Minister for Health. The Newman LNP government closed the Health Complaints and Quality Commission. The LNP—let me say it again—ripped 4,820 jobs out of our health system, including 1,800 nurses and midwives.

The Leader of the Opposition and the LNP failed to stand up to their federal colleague Tony Abbott and the good friend of the Leader of the Opposition Warren Truss in Canberra, whose very first budget sought to cut billions of dollars from future health funding for Queensland. Patient safety and quality improvement systems were dismantled by a short-sighted government. At the last election the only plan the LNP had was a fire sale of the state's assets and continued cuts to jobs and services

for Queenslanders. The LNP's health policy was to cut costs by cutting corners, undermine patient safety with staff reduction, reduce services and cut funding to valuable community organisations. Time and time again I have heard stories from Queenslanders who were shocked and dismayed by what happened to Queensland's health system—all of which happened under the watch of the Leader of the Opposition.

In that respect I have been asked many times by Queenslanders about the LNP's wait time gimmick. Let me be clear: the Leader of the Opposition's wait time gimmick did not deliver one single dollar for patients. It shows the twisted priorities of those opposite that they wanted to spend \$77 million on spin and bureaucracy for their wait time gimmick, and not one cent of that money was to be spent on services for patients. The Leader of the Opposition's plan when he was the health minister was to sack nurses and health staff and to buy advertisements. While the federal coalition plans to rip billions of dollars out of Queensland's health and hospital systems, the Palaszczuk government is investing significant amounts in health services. As a government, Labor has immediately made \$30 million available to hospital and health services to target the 114,000 patients left in waiting rooms by the member for Southern Downs. That is 114,000 Queenslanders who have been waiting longer than clinically recommended for an outpatient appointment. Let us reflect on the millions of dollars that were poured into the Queensland health system by the federal Labor government that reduced waiting lists for surgery and dental waiting lists, and we heard nothing from those opposite for three years. The member for Southern Downs spent three years wandering around Queensland telling everyone how good he was as the health minister and then asking people to tell him how good he was.

A government member: And then spending money!

Mr DICK: And then spending money on advertising to tell people how good he was as the health minister. Do members remember that ad on television for the wait time gimmick with the elderly man standing there and seeing all the numbers disappear? What was disappearing was the \$77 million spent on advertising for spin, bureaucracy and media. That is the legacy of the member for Southern Downs. In contrast, Labor will take a genuine, transparent and realistic approach to tackling waiting lists across the whole patient journey—from GP referral to outpatient or diagnostic appointment and then to surgery and recovery.

The question the Leader of the Opposition needs to answer is why on earth he thought it was prudent to sack 1,800 nurses and midwives and then spend \$77 million on nothing but bureaucracy and television advertisements. Sadly, the cuts made by Lawrence Springborg and the state LNP are reflected in the approach to health adopted by Tony Abbott and his federal coalition colleagues.

Despite our Prime Minister promising no cuts to health—remember that, Mr Speaker?—the Abbott government plans to take \$50 billion out of Australia's health system. Billions have been stolen from Queenslanders on the watch of the Leader of the Opposition. Why did the Leader of the Opposition say and do nothing to protect Queensland? Why did the Leader of the Opposition do nothing to oppose Tony Abbott's cruel and unjustifiable cuts? Why does the member for Southern Downs not stand up for Queensland? Perhaps he is taking the same approach that he took to Campbell Newman: advocate leadership, avoid responsibility, deny duty and say nothing to a leader who wants to bully Queensland. Tony Abbott wants to bully Queensland. I am saying, as all members on this side of the House are saying, that the fight against Tony Abbott starts today.

What have I learned in the past 38 days as health minister? I have learned that television ads do not cure people; doctors and nurses do. I have learned, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, that you cannot cut your way to a world-class health system. As I have said, I have a message for the Liberals in Canberra and for all members opposite: the fight against the cuts starts today. The Abbott government and all members opposite need to know from today onwards that the Queensland Labor government, led by Annastacia Palaszczuk, will not sit idly by while that government trashes its election commitments and rips funding out of Queensland's health services.

Tony Abbott and the Leader of the Opposition have dismantled the hospital funding system put in place by a federal Labor government—activity based funding, funding 45 per cent in efficient growth in the system. That is what came out of the national partnership agreement—a national partnership agreement in health now repudiated and rejected by Tony Abbott, all the time supported by the Leader of the Opposition. Instead of sharing the load of increasing costs in the health system, the Abbott government simply shifts the blame and shifts the problem onto state governments. I am saying that that is simply not good enough for Queensland.

I ask that all members reflect on just how it is that we come to be in this place today having this debate. I respectfully ask that particularly members opposite stop and consider why it is that they are sitting where they are sitting today. The last three years of LNP government were characterised by

disrespect, disingenuousness and outright dishonesty. The LNP simply took the electorate for granted. They thought they could not lose and they simply stopped listening to Queensland. And are they not demonstrating today that they are the sorest of sore losers?

The LNP forgot about the primacy of parliament and the representative nature of our democracy. The LNP tried to impose their program of asset sales on an electorate that did not support it—an electorate that told the LNP it did not support their program. But in their arrogance they simply refused to listen. The LNP undermined public trust and confidence in the institutions of government by gagging debate, ramming through legislation at will and neutering parliamentary committees that opposed their great leader and their government.

The LNP silenced and banished non-government organisations and community groups who dared to disagree with them. In their arrogance, led by the now opposition leader, the LNP extended their attack to other significant professional groups and civil society organisations such as doctors, trade unions and professional associations because those groups dared to raise concerns about the LNP's extreme industrial relations agenda and the doctor contracts pursued by the now Leader of the Opposition. The LNP botched judicial appointments and undermined public confidence and trust in the judiciary and the institutions that we as a community rely on to deliver justice in this state. For any government, that is simply unforgivable. The LNP's culture of arrogance and their disregard for accountability and proper processes led to countless questionable decisions and to a devastating electoral result for them on 31 January this year.

Only a Queensland Labor government will drive improvement of health care and bring integrity and accountability back to not just our state but also our healthcare system. I ask all honourable members to vote for confidence in Queensland—vote for confidence in our state's economy; vote for confidence in openness, accountability and transparent government; vote for confidence in a fairer, stronger and better health system; vote for confidence in the Palaszczuk Labor government.