




Speech By
Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Health and Ambulance Services Committee, Report

 **Ms LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (9.18 pm): I rise to speak on the Health and Ambulance Services Committee's report on the 2015-16 budget estimates process. The committee has made one recommendation: that the proposed expenditure detailed in the Appropriation Bill for the committee's areas of responsibility be agreed to.

I have had the opportunity to work behind the scenes in a policy role on a number of estimates over the years. I found this past experience invaluable in understanding the mechanics of the estimates process, but I do not mind telling you that the experience of sitting behind a minister during a hearing did not bear much resemblance to sitting in front of a minister as a committee member and chair.

Apart from some spirited debate with my committee colleagues across the chamber and the member for Caloundra on who talks when, for how long and what constitutes an appropriate question, I am happy to report that all survived relatively unscathed. However, histrionics aside, I enjoyed immensely the opportunity to participate in the process and chair the hearing. I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Health for his frank and comprehensive responses to the committee's questioning. His mastery of a complex portfolio was obvious at the hearing. I also thank the director-general, Commissioner Bowles, senior executives of the Department of Health and the Ambulance Service and chief executive officers of agencies within the committee's portfolio area for their attendance and contributions at the hearing.

The Health and Ambulance Services portfolio is very large and service driven with a budget to match. The proposed health expenditure considered by the committee represents a record investment of \$14.2 billion in the current fiscal year and an additional \$2.3 billion over four years to make sure health and ambulance services keep pace with the ongoing growth and demand for services across Queensland. The \$320.3 million to reverse former cuts to front-line services and address priority areas of need, \$11.8 million to rebuild intensive mental health care for young people through expanded youth residential mental health services and the re-establishment of patient safety and quality improvement services with 20 new positions was very welcome and will benefit all who rely on Queensland's public health system. Funding for 4,000 new graduate nursing and midwifery places and 400 nurse navigators over four years is a highlight of the budget and was a significant focus of government member questioning during the estimates hearing. Prioritising and funding nursing workforce initiatives is an investment in patient safety, further complemented by the government's commitment to legislate a safe nurse-to-patient ratio to ensure fair workloads. As the minister knows, I am married to a registered nurse and sit beside one in this chamber. I thank the minister for making this investment in Queensland nurses. My electorate of Nudgee and all of Queensland will be well served by these investments.

In reviewing the budget estimates for the portfolio, it would be remiss of me not to mention the significant impact that federal funding cuts will have on Queensland public hospitals. The budget papers estimate that Queensland's share of these cuts on a population basis is \$11.8 billion from 2017 to 2025. I hope that new leadership at a federal level may mean revised thinking and a renewed commitment to funding public health care in this country.

The Queensland Ambulance Service is working in close partnership with the state hospital and health services to deliver an integrated and timely patient focused service. Funding included in the budget to recruit an additional 75 paramedics throughout the state and an expansion of extended acute therapy for patients suffering a heart attack to all advance-care paramedics was welcomed by no-one more than our own resident committee paramedic, the member for Thuringowa.

I will reflect for a moment on the overall conduct of the hearing. Consideration of the budget estimates allows for the public examination of both the responsible minister and chief executive officers of agencies within the committee's portfolio area. Standing order 181(d) allows for the direct questioning of the director-general or chief executive officer in accordance with Schedule 7. I think this capacity to directly question those senior officers charged directly with operationalising government policy and, therefore, expenditure is an important accountability measurement. However, I do not believe that the intended purpose of standing order 181(d) is to inhibit responsible ministers from answering questions related to their portfolio expenditure. On a quick review of the questions asked by opposition members during our hearing, 90 per cent were directed to the director-general or senior executives and only 10 per cent to the minister. I do not believe this serves the public interest, which has an expectation that the government will be held to account for its policy decisions, not simply the director-general for the operationalisation of those policies.

I acknowledge my fellow committee members for their contributions. As a committee, we have spirited debate and we disagree vehemently on particular points, of course, but also find points of shared agreement. I feel certain that, with continued quality time together, my committee colleagues across the chamber will more and more come around to my way of thinking. In closing, I must right a tremendous faux pas committed on the day of the estimates hearing—call it a rookie error. When concluding proceedings, I overlooked thanking the committee secretariat. I do so now and convey my sincere and heartfelt thanks to Brook Hastie, Kath Dalladay, Emily Booth and Clare Keyes for the professional and expert advice provided. They do a tremendous amount of analysis and work on behalf of the committee.

(Time expired)