




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 23 October 2019

MOTION

Queensland Health

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.40 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion. I do so because Queenslanders deserve a world-class public health system. The people in my part of the world, the Wide Bay Burnett health district, are suffering and the Labor government is not delivering solutions. When we review the latest performance data—and maybe people need to read the data to see the facts—we see ambulance ramping and surgery wait times increasing. With a toxic culture returning to Queensland Health, this reflects directly on the government. The minister must show leadership if for no other reason than respecting and assisting our hard working nurses, doctors, midwives and paramedics who are struggling to cope and need more help on the front line to improve patient care. After all, it is about the patients.

I intend today to again speak up for the people of the Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and Maryborough regions who are entitled to public transparency and answers on the circumstances of the standing down of the chief executive of the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service. We have seen Queensland Health's hospital performance data showing that ambulance ramping is increasing and surgery wait times are getting worse. I take little comfort when ambulance ramping is up 12 per cent statewide since the last election and, unfortunately, in Bundaberg it is up six per cent.

The main issue that is increasingly obvious when it comes to health is that the Labor government has the wrong priorities. Patient care must be the priority. We have many political distractions that have stalled innovation, information technology upgrades and my big fear in the standing down of the CEO in Bundaberg is the business case development for the new Bundaberg Hospital. I have raised previously that the new acting chief executive, who is doing a great job, was the lead on the business case. To date—a month out—no answers to my questions have been provided. I note some commentary via media release that has not dispelled my community's real fear of the new hospital's future. Again, we need the minister's leadership.

I again highlight that many questions have not been answered. The minister needs to come to Bundaberg immediately to sort this mess out. We have to get Health back on track. The last month has been disastrous for staff morale. I again assure all staff that we are fighting for their right to be treated better. People have not forgotten at the last state election Labor promised better local health services. After almost five years of failed policies, wrong priorities and political interference we have seen things go backwards. Those serious questions have not been addressed.

There are real issues of integrity, accountability and process that must be addressed. I again call for a full external investigation of the board chair's actions in the so-called sacking of the chief executive. After a month of secrecy and no answers, on behalf of my community I again ask: was the chief executive put on special leave or terminated as claimed in an email to 4,000 staff; why after seven years of excellent service was the Australian Chief Executive of the Year marched out of the hospital; what reasons were given for his dismissal and did they directly relate to a mental health crisis; will the minister

call for a review of events prior to Mr Pennington's crisis event and Facebook post and how he was managed leading up to his dismissal; can the minister confirm that this was not a personal vendetta; was the appointment of any employees a contributing factor; and—this is an important one and it must be put on the public record—what mental health support has been given to staff members and, in particular, to Mr Pennington since he was escorted from the Bundaberg Hospital a month ago? The sources who we are talking to state contrary to what the board chair is saying in the media. We have to look after all staff in regard to their mental health. These are reasonable questions. The minister has not provided any answers.

While our hospital is now sliding quickly in terms of performance, as the monthly data shows and as I predicted it would, we know more broadly that there are more leadership integrity concerns. Current and former nurses are still being harassed as a result of Labor's health payroll debacle. The rollout of the integrated electronic medical record system has the potential to be even worse than the payroll debacle. This is about patient care. Despite the failures in relation to the bungled ordering systems and massive issues with the \$135 million replacement of the old ordering system that has been going since August, nurses are having to order basic medical supplies. We are also hearing about contractors who are not being paid.

We created these hospital and health services to give our communities opportunities to engage with the health system and we must make sure that political interference is kept out of it. We doubled the patient travel subsidy. The chief executive in my part of the world did a great job for the community by making sure that all patients were given the health services they need. Regional maternity services that were shut down under the Bligh government are now back in play. In closing, it is important that we get these answers but, more importantly, this minister must get out of the road of what is a bad health system.