



Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

### **APPROPRIATION BILL**

#### **Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

#### **Appropriation Bill**

#### **Health and Environment Committee, Report**

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (6.17 pm): This time last month we sat in estimates hearings for the Health and Environment Committee. Between the state of our health system and the state of our environment—two issues crucial to Queenslanders—one would think the inquiry would be an opportunity for transparency and accountability in government decision-making, but the entire estimates process in Queensland is pretty embarrassing for the government. The sessions are dominated by Dorothy Dixers from government backbenchers, mixed with some very adversarial debates with the opposition.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Dr MacMAHON:** There is an example. With the crumbs of time left over for the crossbench I asked about funding for eating disorders, funding for rural maternity services, crucial access to pregnancy terminations and pressures on our ambulance system. By and large we received indirect and filibustering responses. It was not any better for my colleague, Michael Berkman, asking questions about the environment portfolio.

Estimates should not be a waste of time. It is hard to see what the government is trying to achieve with the system we currently have. With changes like a ban on Dorothy Dixers, providing enough time for crossbench MPs to ask questions and expanding access to questions on notice we can ensure that estimates delivers some real transparency and accountability for Queenslanders, like transparency in our health system.

There is a crisis in our health system in Queensland, with the pandemic further disrupting a system that is already stretched to its limits. I have had nurses, patients and healthcare workers visiting my office to raise the alarm about people dying while waiting for ambulances, overworked staff and ballooning waiting lists. To give an idea of the decision-making that got us here, when the government realised its bottom line was out after the first shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic it froze the wages for healthcare workers instead of doing things such as raising royalties or levying property developers. That wage freeze is still in effect, meaning that nurses, allied health workers and frontline workers are being paid less than what the government signed them up for and less than they deserve, ripping millions of dollars out of our economy and out of the hands of essential workers right when we need it most.

The same mindset led to a two per cent efficiency dividend being slapped on Queensland Health at the same time as the government was talking up its health commitments ahead of the election. The example the Treasurer gave here was pretty visceral. He asked us to imagine that we were asking Queensland Health to do 100 endoscopies a day and now we are just asking them to do 102 with the same money. I say, why not just tax mining billionaires properly? Why not tax property developers properly? Why not tax those companies that have profited over the pandemic—those companies that you get donations from—and fund the health care that Queenslanders need?

It is not just the hospital system that is in crisis. Even before people get to the hospitals, our ambulance system is stretched to its limit. During estimates I asked about single-officer stations and how the Ambulance Service plans for the safety issues associated with those. The incidents of ramping were well covered during the hearings. If we raised revenue from the big end of town, we could create tens of thousands more hospital beds, 1,000 more ICU beds and raise Queensland to world-best standard. We could employ thousands of new nurses and doctors, expanding much needed emergency department capacity and improving nurse-to-patient ratios.

This morning we heard about the vital importance of voluntary assisted dying in Queensland, alongside the need to urgently boost investment in palliative care. The budget commits just \$171 million for the palliative care strategy through to 2025-26, which sits starkly against the extra \$247 million per year that we actually need for a functioning palliative care system.

I asked about funding for eating disorder treatments and I urged the Queensland government to ensure that federal funding flows through to community services on the ground. I asked about the Rural Maternity Taskforce and plans to ensure good access to maternity care for all Queenslanders. I asked about the lack of access to pregnancy terminations. Despite decriminalisation, abortions remain inaccessible to most Queenslanders. Like all other health care, abortions should be safe, legal and freely accessible in our public healthcare system. Against this backdrop we have a government allowing NRL players and families over the border instead of Queenslanders who are stuck interstate.