



Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health and Environment Committee, Report

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (5.28 pm): I rise to contribute to the Appropriations Bill debate. Everyone in this chamber will remember those opposite exclaiming that this was a typical Labor budget. Well, yes, indeed it was. The budget estimate process revealed this typical Labor budget for what it really was: a sham. It is a sham which lets down the people of Queensland on so many levels.

Despite it being a record health budget, more ambulances are being ramped at our hospitals than ever before. It is at 41 per cent statewide. That number is the worst in living memory. Queensland's elective surgery waiting lists have ballooned, and the time taken to be seen in emergency departments has lengthened. Whether it is on a hospital ramp, a surgery waiting list or inside our emergency departments, more and more Queenslanders are waiting longer than clinically recommended to be treated, and that is to the detriment of all Queenslanders.

Who could forget on the morning of the estimates hearing the health minister hastily announcing \$163.7 million to increase capacity across the system? Let the record show that the funding for additional capacity was not new money; instead, it was already earmarked in the 2021-22 budget delivered only weeks earlier. That announcement was more about the health of the government than the health of Queenslanders. Seriously, where are the priorities of those opposite? They care about themselves more than they care about honest Queenslanders.

At the estimates hearing last month, the much hyped \$2 billion Hospital Building Fund announced by the government on budget day was shown to be a furphy. When asking hospital and health service CEOs about what funding was available to them through the fund, some recalled funding which was made up from regular capital expenditure. That was deeply concerning to me, and I will tell members why. It was apparent the government had not clearly communicated the details of the fund to hospital and health service chief executives. The health minister actually had to intervene and correct the record. As far as I am concerned, that is not a slight on the HHS CEOs; that is the health minister's failure to do her job properly. The health minister is losing control of her grip on the health system. This lack of detail did not come as a surprise, as the Hospital Building Fund, reportedly worth \$2 billion, was not even notated on a budget paper line item in the 2021-22 budget documents. Imagine that—imagine a \$2 billion fund without a line item. It is something out of a comedy. It is pathetic public administration.

When and how the funding will be used remains a mystery, not only to the opposition but apparently also to the hospital and health service executives. The director-general advised that the fund is being held by Queensland Treasury and that Queensland Health was not privy to further information on how funding would be released over time. How can the department effectively plan to increase capacity in this system without understanding what funding is available? The Hospital Building Fund was always a fund without funding, based on accounting without principles. The estimates hearing revealed that it will not deliver a cent to build a single new hospital in Queensland this financial year.

It was also revealed that none of the government's seven satellite facilities will contain emergency departments or overnight beds. The LNP believe these facilities will do little, if anything, to alleviate the current capacity pressures which have beset Queensland's public hospital system. Queenslanders who voted for the government in October 2020 based on their promise to build hospitals should rightly feel aggrieved that these facilities will offer services akin to a health clinic rather than a hospital.

Finally, I want to round out my contribution with the issues about ambulance ramping. There is widespread acknowledgement that the Queensland Ambulance Service is under significant strain. Reports in the mainstream media have indicated that ambulances are often delayed, sometimes significantly, when responding to triple 0 calls. At the hearing it was confirmed that the commissioner of the Queensland Ambulance Service receives a live feed of ambulance ramping on a monitor in his office. That data is reported monthly to Queensland Health but is now only released on a quarterly basis. What is the health minister trying to hide? Those opposite are embarrassed about their record on ambulance ramping, and so they should be.

As a final note, I too would like to thank all those frontline healthcare staff who have endured so much over the past 18 months. They have been asked to do more with less by this government and we thank them all for their dedication—

Government members interjected.

Ms BATES: We thank them all for their dedication and devotion to keeping Queenslanders fit and healthy in these uncertain times.