



Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.08 pm): As a member of the Health and Environment Committee, I rise to speak on my committee's budget estimates report for the 2021-22 financial year. I first want to acknowledge the enormous contribution made by all of our health and ambulance workers over the past 18 months in response to the COVID-19 crisis and thank them all for their hard work and dedication. In total, this year's budget included \$480 million to continue the COVID-19 response which will deliver fever clinics, contact tracing and testing capability, the vaccination program, compliance activities, facilitation in government arranged accommodation, COVID-19 contact centres and wellness checks for people in mandatory quarantine.

I also raise the fact that the government has been petitioned by Mr Petrovsky from Flinders University. I have spoken to one of the professors at QIMR. I would like to see a joint venture to manufacture Mr Petrovsky's vaccine if it does become available and it meets all the requirements, which is looking very promising. It gives people choice and it gives them another option.

Despite this outlay, however, it is no secret to anyone in Queensland that in certain areas our healthcare sector has reached a point of extreme crisis. Much of rural and remote Queensland relies on fly-in fly-out workers, with some dependant solely on locum workers. In some areas we see a real crisis of workforce. This means there are many communities that are critically underserved. Some rural hospitals have no doctor to cover the one on duty and no effective emergency service.

Currently we have thousands of local doctors and nurses who are unable to travel to regional, rural and remote towns in Queensland due to border closures, which has made our health workforce staff levels much worse. This shortage means communities are missing out on health care and some rural hospitals may be forced into bypass with inadequate staff levels to function. In certain areas Queensland's hospital system is buckling under the number of patients flooding through its doors. We are seeing critical shortages of GPs in the regions, a major shortage of bulk-billing and no beds. We need hundreds more beds and a lot more funding and resources—a lot more. I know in my own region hospitals are struggling to cope with clogged emergency departments, chronic ambulance ramping, too few beds and a lot of burnt-out staff who are struggling to stay in their jobs. We are seeing record numbers of patients and hospitals that just do not have the staff or beds to cope. The system is swamped.

To fix this problem the government could grant exemptions to health workers and alternatives to mandatory 14-day hotel quarantine. There are a range of strategies that the government could use to support staff and make sure Queenslanders have access to high-quality clinical care during this latest crisis. Some suggestions I have heard include escalating virtual health platforms, redeploying clinical staff to higher risk areas and appointing locums from other areas of the state. A big part of the problem is the way our health sector has become a political football between the state and federal governments. The feds say it is a state issue and the state says it is a feds issue and nothing seems to happen in the mix of that. I do not care which government does it so long as someone frees up hospital beds or we will see the sector move past crisis mode into full meltdown. We do not want to see that. We do not want to put our hospital staff and frontline workers under so much pressure and duress that the system fails for them as well.

In closing I thank the other members of the committee. I wish our head secretariat, Jacqui Dewar, all the best after her recent operation. My thoughts go out to Jacqui. Thank you to all the staff. The other members played a very important role in the hearing in helping to provide some much needed oversight and scrutiny to the process. There was a bit of a kerfuffle, as other members have spoken about. We need to keep things cordial and also make sure that the process is worthwhile and meaningful. The health and environmental systems that we have in Queensland are very important to our state. They need to be treated as such.