




Speech By
Bryson Head

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 7 March 2024

HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (12.12 pm): This bill covers various aspects of health legislation; however, the key amendment I want to speak on today will see the legislated introduction of midwife-to-patient ratios, being one midwife to six patients. A specific addition to this is that newborn babies will be included in this ratio as a separate patient to the parent. Many stakeholders note that these are sensible changes, of which the LNP are certainly supportive. That said, I have genuine questions that I hope the minister can answer in her reply to the second reading debate.

How will this impact maternity services that are already struggling to attract staff? Are there enough midwives to fill new positions once these laws come into effect? Will the minister guarantee that there will not be any more midwife position vacancies for extended lengths of time in rural Queensland following the introduction of this bill? Will the minister guarantee that no rural community will be worse off following the introduction of this bill with regard to accessing midwifery services? Will the minister start reopening rural maternity services rather than closing them?

I certainly have legitimate concerns that, without good governance of our health system and specific and appropriate management of these amendments, there will be more pressures on rural and regional hospitals where staff shortages are already a major concern. I know that there are midwives in rural Queensland who currently have significantly more patients to manage than what is currently recommended. What is the minister doing to address this? They are already overworked and the government has failed to attract and retain colleagues for them. Women are the ones suffering because of this failure under Labor's health crisis.

I recently attended meetings in the North Burnett and Darling Downs with representatives from council, medical centres, and hospital and health services to discuss current issues within the local health region including staff shortages, staff accommodation, health system modelling and other health related matters. I am acutely aware of the challenges also faced in Central Queensland. Being Women's Week, let's talk about some facts of Labor's record here in Queensland.

The electorate of Callide is almost 75,000 square kilometres. It is larger than the state of Tasmania. It has 14 hospitals, none of which have an operational maternity ward. Some of the towns across the electorate have grown significantly in recent decades, yet health services, and specifically maternity services, have gone backwards. These are vital women's health services and the Miles Labor government has cut them from my community.

Specifically, Premier Miles was the health minister who placed the Chinchilla maternity ward on full bypass over five years ago. It went on partial bypass under Labor way back in 2017 and Labor have been in power ever since. Chinchilla had a fully operational maternity ward when just 3,000-odd people lived there. There are now over 7,000 people, with thousands more in surrounding communities. They are young communities and we still do not have a maternity ward. This is appalling and shows there are two classes of women under a Labor government: there are women in the bush, who are left without essential health services, and then there is everyone else. What a disgrace.

Let's not forget about Gladstone. The city of Gladstone did not have maternity services for nearly a full year under this Labor government. Let's not forget about Chloe, who gave birth to baby Matilda on the side of the Bruce Highway. Chloe called on the health minister for an apology and did she get one? No! What did the government do? Their public comments suggested that Matilda was not born on the side of the highway. I dare the minister to come and stand in that spot with me and look Chloe in the eye and say that is not what she experienced. In lieu of that, the minister should stomp up the courage and apologise for both the incident happening in the first place and the misleading comments that were made about her experience.

Earlier this week I was on the phone to a local expectant mother. She has been told that there is a new policy in place regarding midwifery care. She has no maternity services in her home town so she must travel away to give birth. If she then chooses to birth privately, when she comes home, rather than having the full six weeks of postnatal care, she will only be able to receive two visits. Should this choice be made, once again she will be forced to travel hundreds of kilometres with a newborn for ongoing postnatal care. I note that there are insufficient GPs in the bush for her to be guaranteed appointments in due time should she wish to see a GP.

The Miles Labor government shuts down local maternity services, forcing mothers to travel hundreds of kilometres. If those mothers—because they are travelling anyway—make a choice as to what building they give birth in, public or private, then Labor will cut their access to midwifery care. I ask the minister to investigate this immediately. If any HHS has such a policy in place, I request that an order is immediately issued to stop this practice that discriminates against a woman's choice.

Something else I want to place on the record is the continued rejection of the plight of women in the bush by the Labor backbench. It was only this morning when I was making comments about the lack of maternity services in Callide that I heard laughter on that side of the chamber. I dare those members who find this a laughing matter to come and sit down with the women who have had to give birth on the side of the highway.

Labor continue to pretend that they are a woman's best friend, yet we see amendments changing gendered language from 'woman' to 'person'. Yes, they are literally removing women from laws. They have cut 37 maternity wards in Queensland, resulting in multiple women giving birth on major highways and, yes, they are actively removing women from our laws. This is not what any government that truly respects women would do.

If Labor wants to show the world that it cares about women, then it will be reopening maternity wards instead of closing them. I will never give up the fight for more services for women, including maternity services and access to GPs in my electorate and across rural Queensland. I note that there are many more parts to this bill that I have not covered; however, I cannot elaborate any better than the shadow minister for health, the member for Mudgeeraba. If people wish to find out more about the LNP's position on these matters, I certainly encourage them to listen to her great speech. Ultimately, women in the bush are getting left behind and it is simply not good enough. If you want to help women in Queensland, then show Labor the door in 2024.