




Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Tuesday, 14 February 2012

MOTION: PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE REBATE

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (5.56 pm): I support the motion moved by the shadow minister for health, the member for Caloundra, condemning Labor's plan to means-test the private health insurance rebate. While the means testing of the rebate is a Gillard Labor policy, it might as well be a Bligh Labor policy because, once again, we have heard nothing but silence from state Labor when federal Labor has come up with another harebrained scheme that will hurt Queenslanders. It was the same with the carbon tax and any number of other disastrous policies from Canberra Labor that Bligh Labor has embraced with enthusiasm, putting Labor mates ahead of the people of Queensland.

As the shadow minister for regional Queensland, I want to underline the serious impact this policy will have on Queenslanders living in rural, regional and remote areas of the state. This is another example of Labor's indifference towards them. Health services in regional, rural and remote Queensland leave a lot to be desired. As I have said on many occasions in this place, you do not actually have to go all the way to remote areas of this state to find that health services that small rural towns have had for many decades and that should be considered fundamental services, such as maternity, have been consistently withdrawn and centralised over the past 20 years by this long-term Labor government.

The impact on the regions of Labor's plans to means-test the private health insurance rebate will be greater in Queensland than in other states. While we know that overall Queensland currently lags behind other states in the number of people with private health insurance, historically we know that, compared to other states, a higher than average number of people living in regional Queensland have had private health insurance. An article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in 2005 published data from the ABS that showed that the proportion of people with private health insurance was lower for people living outside capital cities. The biggest difference at that time was in Tasmania, where it was almost 14 per cent, while the smallest difference was in Queensland, where it was less than half a per cent. I table that article for the information of the House.

Tabled paper: Copy of article from Medical Journal of Australia, dated 21 March 2005, titled 'Private health insurance and regional Australia' [6448].

While it is true that Queensland has the most decentralised population outside of our capital city of all the states, this also means that we have the largest number of people living outside of our capital cities seeking access to health services.

So the means testing of the private health insurance rebate will have a bigger impact on Queensland because we have more people in the regions seeking health services. The Bligh government has tried to defend its centralisation of health services in big cities by arguing that it costs more to deliver health services in regional Queensland. If that is true, it makes no sense whatsoever to support a policy that will reduce the number of people taking out private health insurance in the regions that will result in more people relying on public hospitals and health facilities in the regions, further driving up these costs. The Bligh government has also tried to defend its withdrawal of fundamental health services in the regions by arguing that it is difficult to retain specialist health professionals in regional areas. If that is true, it also makes no sense to support a policy that will reduce the number of people living in the regions with private health insurance whom specialist health professionals based in the regions treat and rely on to make their

living. If they find it more difficult to make a living in the regions, surely it will be even harder to retain specialist health services in the bush.

The withdrawal and centralisation of more and more health services into our larger cities has meant more and more patients have been forced to travel longer and longer distances to access treatment under this long-term Labor government. The LNP is committed to helping regional, rural and remote Queenslanders to access these services by doubling the cents-per-kilometre subsidy from 15c to 30c and doubling the accommodation subsidy from \$30 to \$60 per night under the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Increases to the PTSS, given more and more people have been forced to travel more and more often for health services, are long overdue and have been ignored and neglected by the Bligh Labor government and the Beattie Labor government before it. The LNP will attempt to provide some relief by delivering the overdue increase to the PTSS, but one wonders if the already enormous waiting lists to access health services in regional hospitals will be even further extended by thousands of people being forced to abandon their private health insurance as a result of the loss of the rebate through this means test. It is a short-sighted, narrow-minded policy from the Gillard Labor government supported by this tired, compliant Bligh Labor government that is failing to stand up for Queenslanders, particularly Queenslanders living in the regions.