



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BUSINESS**

**Leave of Absence**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 21 March 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Speaker** Dutton, Peter, MP

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**Mr DUTTON** (Dickson) (15:59): We are here to speak on a very important motion on a day that will be historic in its significance. It will be a day of shame for the Labor Party because this is a party that over the next seven weeks will have the ability to hang their head in shame when they go before the Australian public. It is a very sad occasion indeed for a party steeped in such history that they would find themselves in this position today. It is not just bad for the party but bad for the Australian public.

I am often accused of being old-fashioned in many ways, but I believe very strongly that the Australian government's first charge is to protect its people; to protect our borders; to make sure that we defend our citizens; to make sure that we provide for them and their families; to make sure that we have a bright future for generations to come. Yet, when I move not just around my electorate but around hospitals and surgeries and chemists around the country, when I talk to people in the streets and at airports, when I talk to those people who are doing it tough, they do not share the optimism that should be there for the Australian people in the 21st century. This government was elected five years ago to deliver basic provisions to the Australian people. They gave commitments, not just in the area of border protection, which they have been a complete failure on, but also in relation to the area that I have the most interest in in this parliament, and that is the issue of health.

The government's second charge after protecting its people is to make sure that they have a healthy environment in which to live, that is, that they have access to services, doctors, public hospitals,—particularly in cases of urgent emergent need for medical attention—that they can see a dentist, that they can receive medicines on a timely basis. Yet if we look at the last five years, and the last two years in particular, this government has nothing—nothing at all—that it can say to the Australian people in relation to health that it has delivered on. Is it any wonder that the government finds itself in this position and that we are contributing to this debate in relation to what not just the next couple of hours but the next seven weeks will provide for the government.

This government had the opportunity, it built up goodwill in 2007 and 2008, to do a lot for the Australian people in relation to the provision of health services in this country. Yet what have we seen? We have seen the same approach by Labor to health as we saw by state Labor, and that is a priority of bureaucrats over patients. A building of bureaucratic structures which has starved the government of the opportunity to provide health services to those most in need. Is it any wonder, when this government, over the course of the last 12 months, spends \$1 billion on bureaucrats, that there is no money left for patients.

This government have failed on those first two basic fronts. That is why the Australian public is completely disillusioned with where the Labor Party is headed today, and people do not even know at this hour, just after four o'clock, with less than 30 minutes to go before a leadership ballot, whether or not Kevin Rudd is actually going to stick his hand up for this ballot. They are not saying to the Australian people that they want a leader who is going to lead this country forward. They are not able to say to the Australian public that they want Kevin Rudd because they think he is the best person for the future of this country. This government are saying to the Australian people that they want the member for Griffith not for those reasons which are in the best interests of our country, to protect our borders and to provide for the health of our nation. They are saying they despise this man and yet they want him because they think he can save a couple of their seats.

Is it any wonder that Australians of every political persuasion hang their head in shame at this government at this point in our history. Whether the Labor Party revert to Kevin Rudd, whether they go to Bill Shorten, whether Simon Crean comes in, whether Wayne Swan remains as Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer or whether they stick with the current Prime Minister, it matters not, because they cannot deliver on the basic outcomes that the Australian people require for themselves and for their families. In relation to these basic requirements, particularly in relation to health, not only have this government been able to create great big new bureaucratic structures, which is where they completely corrupted the public hospital network at a state level, they have been able to set in train a series of policies which have set us back in the health cause in this country. This government have wasted \$650 million on a so-called GP superclinic program which put GP superclinics into marginal seats

across the country, not in areas of need. What it did was it pitched capital of taxpayers—taxpayer provided funds—to set up these great big clinics in competition with existing clinics. So the doctors and nurses and proprietors who had set up these superclinics already, their own enterprise, had competition that was sponsored by the government on the diagonal clinic. What did it do? It did not result in more doctors coming to a particular area. It resulted in the cannibalising of the existing service, the doctors leaving the existing practice and going across to the new one. Why? Because, with \$5 million gifted to them by the taxpayers of this country through this incompetent government, the new superclinic was able to offer lower overheads and therefore higher wages to the doctors from the clinic across the road. Did that provide any further services to the Australian people? No, it did not.

But the government did not stop there, and that is why they find themselves in this turmoil today and that is why we have built up to this position of crisis today. The government attacked private health insurance. There are 10½ million Australians with private health insurance, half the population have private health insurance in this country, and the fact is that if we do not provide support to those who are privately insured in this country we will collapse the public system. The system that was in place under John Howard, and that will be in place under Tony Abbott if we win the election, is to provide good balance between the public and private systems. We want to make sure that we can retain those people who are privately insured, because we do not want people to leave private health insurance. We do not want those who can afford private health insurance lining up and putting extra pressure into our already overburdened public hospitals. We do not want people who can afford to have private health insurance making it harder for pensioners and people of low income waiting months and in some cases years for hips or for knees.

If this coalition is elected at the next election I want us to be judged on the number of services and interventions that we can provide to the sick people of our country, because that is a basic charge of a government in the 21st century in a developed nation like ours. I do not want to be judged, as a health minister in this country, if the coalition wins the next election, on how many bureaucrats we employ in Canberra or in other structures around the country. I want us to be judged by the number of doctors and nurses that we can provide financial support to to deliver those health outcomes to the sickest in our country. That is what a responsible government should deliver for its people. This government continue to be distracted from those most basic services, and that is why they find themselves in this dilemma today.

It does not stop at their attack on general practice, it does not stop at their attack of 10½ million Australians who have private health insurance; it goes further. The government have ripped a billion dollars out of dental health care in this country. I believe the Australian public want to see a greater investment in dental health care. I believe strongly that the Australian public want to see the government deliver outcomes for those who are suffering dental pain, particularly children. The coalition will deliver such a plan to the Australian public. That is the commitment that we have provided. Again, that is in stark contrast to a government that has been distracted from the main game.

Not only will we address the issue in relation to providing more support for those who are privately insured and restore integrity to the dental system but we will also provide record funding to our public hospitals. The coalition, when we were last in government, when Tony Abbott was the health minister, increased funding to public hospitals. That is a fact that we are particularly proud of.

Over the course of the last six weeks, when this government have been distracted by their internal machinations, they announced a rip-out of \$1.6 billion from public hospitals. It was bad enough that they announced that they were going to cut back money from public hospitals over the coming years, because they have wasted billions, but they announced that they were going to cut funding out of public hospitals in this financial year. Hospital administrators around the country who are managing hospitals and employing doctors and nurses do not wake up in the morning and say, 'We'll decide to do X number of hips'—or knees or backs, whatever elective surgery requirements they have for that day. It takes months of planning. They have to employ extra doctors, and commission extra staff, services and wards. All of that has to be provisioned for. Yet the government said to hospital administrators around the country, 'Here is your budget for this financial year,' and that is what those hospital administrators had budgeted for, so that they could provide for the people who were coming through emergency departments in need of urgent care. But, halfway through the financial year, in November—and bear in mind that services had already been delivered from July through to November—the government announced, with no prior warning, that they were going to cut back on funding in this financial year. In effect, it has a double impact: by cutting a million dollars out of a public hospital in a rural or remote community halfway through a

financial year, you are effectively saying to that hospital, 'We need you to find \$2 million in the second half of the year because you have already spent that proportion in the first half of the year.' Patients are the ones who suffer. That was unprecedented in this country, and it was done by a very bad government getting worse.

My honest belief is that, whether the government stick with Julia Gillard, switch to Kevin Rudd, get themselves into a position to go to Bill Shorten, or Simon Crean sticks his hand up in time, it will make no difference to the outcomes that this government are able to provide. If Kevin Rudd wins today, he will go out there with a speech similar to that which people have heard over the course of the last five or six years, but, believe me, we have watched this government in close proximity for the last five years. There are many decent people in the Labor Party, on the backbench in particular, but those people are as aggrieved and frustrated as we in the Liberal Party are, and as the general public is, that they are being let down by a bad government. You cannot thrust this country into record debt, fail to protect its borders and fail to provide basic health services and then say to the Australian people that you deserve to govern.

That is why I think this government needs to go directly to the Governor-General to deal with this matter and ask the Australian people who they believe is best able to govern this country over the years to come. If we do that we will restore integrity to our borders, we will deliver economic certainty for Australian small businesses, we will get confidence back into the Australian economy, and we will restore funding and balance to our public and private hospital and health systems in this country. We will do it for the people who elect us to do it, and that is what good government is about.