



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Medicare

SPEECH

Tuesday, 15 March 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Jones, Stephen, MP

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Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (15:46): In a few short weeks time the Australian people are going to be sent to an early election. As the government scrambles around for a few policies to put before the Australian people, we know that they are going to be condemned for 2½ years of health policy disaster. They will be rightly condemned for their policies when it comes to primary health care. There was the GP tax mark 1, 2 and 3 and then, through the back door, GP tax mark 4—the tax which the parliament refused to pass—that they are trying to force doctors into introducing by freezing Medicare rebates; and the vicious \$57 billion worth of cuts to public hospital systems.

The member for Bowman asked, in a comical sense, just now: why are waiting lists blowing out in the state of Queensland? Why is it that in his friend the member for Bass's state of Tasmania they are having problems meeting the demand for public dental treatment? If he wants to ask why they are having these problems, he need look no more further than the \$57 billion worth of cuts that his own government is visiting upon the people and that he put his hand up and voted for. It is those very same cuts which are seeing hospitals in New South Wales without doctors. Could you ever think of such a thing: hospitals having no doctors? We are seeing proposals to increase costs of medicines, which are going to hit pensioners and average wage and salary earners hard, locked in the Senate at the moment—the very same Senate that the government is cynically trying to push legislation through this week so that they can control the Senate in a future parliament. We are also seeing an absolute blow-out in the cost of private health insurance. Year after year we are seeing increases of close to six per cent under this government's watch. If the families of Australia are struggling because of the increased costs, they will know who to blame in a few short weeks time.

On the weekend I had the opportunity to talk to Annabelle Lavender, a constituent of mine from Albion Park in New South Wales. She is a pensioner. She is living with cancer. She came to me deeply concerned about the government's cuts to the bulk-billing rebate for pathology services. She said to me that people in her position will not go and have their blood tests done. She needs to have a blood test done every three months. She sees her haematologist once every six months. She is not alone. She has made the point quite clearly to me that this is her No. 1 issue when it comes to the next election. If this government is re-elected, things are going to get worse.

In Senate question time today we saw the minister who was recently elevated to cabinet and who has responsibility for regional health declare to the Senate, in response to a question from Senator Lines from Western Australia, that there had been no cuts to hospitals throughout the term of this government. The Premier of New South Wales disagrees with his senator. The Premier of Victoria and the Premier of Queensland—in fact, every Chief Minister and Premier of every state and territory in the country—disagree with that statement, because they know that they are being faced with the very real prospect of having to close down hospital beds, increase waiting lists for elective surgery and close services in community health. These are the results of this government's cuts.

It is time that the member for Bowman re-forms his Praetorian Guard. We know it was the member for Bowman who was so active in ensuring that the former Prime Minister be thrown out of office because of the impact that his disastrous Medicare plans were having on their electoral prospects. It is time for the member for Bowman to start organising again, because there is one thing that we can be absolutely sure of: the people of Australia will punish the member for Bass, the member for Bowman and all of those Country Party members who are putting their hands in the air and voting for this government's cuts to Medicare and hospital funding. They will punish them if there is not a change in policy.

What we have at the moment is a different Prime Minister and a different Treasurer peddling the same health policies that they took to their first budget. It spells disaster for public health in this country, and the people of Australia are onto it. They know that this government has no policies. That is why the government is spending so much time talking about the opposition. It does not have not a policy of its own. What it has done in health has been an absolute disaster.