



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**DOCUMENTS**

**Australian National Preventive Health Agency**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 28 February 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Senator McLUCAS** (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers and Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (18:17): This is a good opportunity to talk about preventative health and what is happening in my home town of Cairns. Last Monday, a week ago, the Chair of the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Board, Mr Bob Norman, who is known as a very strong supporter of the Liberal Party, stood up and announced that 234 jobs were going to be lost from our hospital. That is on top of a quarter of the jobs on Thursday Island and on top of jobs going from Mosman hospital, from the Mareeba Hospital and from the Innisfail Hospital. In doing that, he took out of his book the classic blame-game language and blamed the federal government for these 234 jobs that are being lost by saying that \$6½ million had been taken from the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital budget. He made no mention in that speech of the \$3 billion that the state government have taken out of their contribution to the Queensland health budget—no mention at all. It was up to community discussion to try and pick out the facts, as they have now come to be revealed, in Mr Norman's funny figuring. If anyone does any sort of work and understands how much on average a hospital worker costs, you will come to a figure of just over \$100,000. If you multiply 234 jobs by about \$100,000—just to make it easy—it comes to a much larger figure than \$6.5 million. So Mr Norman was caught out on that matter initially.

I turn to the way that some of these people were told that they were not of benefit to the health services in North Queensland. Mr Gavin King, who happens to be the state member for Cairns, went out into the media saying these jobs were not frontline jobs, these jobs were not delivering babies and these jobs were not doing important work that happens in our hospitals. So you can imagine that 234 people went home that night thinking, 'What I've been doing, what I've been giving to the people of Queensland, what I've been trying to do for'—in one case—'14 years as a doctor in mental health—all those things I've been doing have been for nothing.' It was offensive not only because of the fact that they lost their jobs but also because they were told that what they were doing has been useless.

Let us now turn to where these jobs have been lost. On Tuesday of last week I had my normal mammogram. Leaving the Cairns breast clinic I said in passing to the woman who gave me the mammogram: 'You guys are all right, aren't you? You'll be okay?' She did not burst into tears but it looked close: they were told that morning that four of their number were going to lose their jobs, but they were not told who. It took days for them to know who was losing their job. That is appalling management, and I sheet that home to Mr Norman, who was appointed by the LNP government and is known to us all in North Queensland as an LNP supporter.

We have lost almost all of our sexual health services in North Queensland. We have lost basically all of our mental health team, particularly those who work in Cape York. We had been making good inroads into the issues of mental health, and what do we find but that all of the doctors and nurses who have been doing work in Cape York around mental health have lost their jobs. I have said that this is a short-sighted measure: it is an extraordinarily short-sighted measure. This will mean that despite the preventive health work that has been done in breast screening, in HIV and AIDS, in sexual health and in mental health—just to mention four areas—we will now end up with more people in our hospital system taking up beds with breast cancer, with HIV and with mental health conditions because the preventive health work has not been done. This is dangerous for the health of the far north, and I sheet this home directly to Mr King and Mr Newman regarding the short-sighted decisions that have been made in our town.