

HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS, ELECTIVE SURGERY

382. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to the Australian Labor Party policy paper “access and quality in our public hospitals”, which promises that Labor will reduce waiting lists and waiting times, and I ask the minister to inform the House why the budget papers indicate increased waiting times for elective surgery in 2001-02.

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for his question. He must be led through the budget papers, as must members of the National Party. Health spending will increase by \$2.3 billion this year. That represents a \$68 million increase on last year’s total expenditure. Compared to the actual amount allocated in last year’s budget, it represents an overall increase of \$140 million. That is a considerable amount by anyone’s standard. All I have heard since last week is members opposite talking down the health system in this State. As I said this morning, it is deliberate scaremongering of country people, which seems to have spread to the city as a result of the member for Murdoch’s comments.

Does the member for Murdoch agree with the Australian Medical Association’s comments? The health problems will not be resolved with one single budget. I am facing the result of eight years of neglect. Health has done very well in this year’s budget; it is the budget’s key priority. In its election commitment the ALP promised the health portfolio would receive an additional \$240 million over four years.

In fact, we will inject an extra \$385 million into the health budget over the next four years. To accuse us of cuts is an absolute nonsense. It is about time people took a bit of responsibility with the health system and stopped talking it down in exactly the same way that people are talking down the tourism industry, as the Premier has quite rightly said.