

MOORA DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Grievance

MR W.J. McNEE (Moore) [9.37 am]: I grieve to the Minister for Health with regard to the Moora District Hospital. It gives me no pleasure to raise this issue. I had more confidence in this Government than it appears I should have had. It is doing things that I thought it would not do. I get rather disturbed when I read in the local paper the headline “New Moora hospital still on ‘operating list’”. I pray that the hospital does not go from the operating list to the operating table and then to the morgue. That is where it appears to be going.

I remind the House that this is a do-nothing Government. In my electorate alone in the last term of office, hospitals were built in Lancelin, Leeman, Jurien Bay, Eneabba and Goomalling. Perhaps we have come to expect a little too much. The previous Government was planning the Moora hospital and decisions were close to being made. The Shire of Moora President has said that it is unacceptable for this Government to perform in the way it has. I hope the minister will say that I am wrong and will clearly outline the Government’s program for the future. I thought that the hospital would be built. I thought it would all fall into place; however, it is not. I read that the long-promised hospital has been delayed for another eight months. Mr Speaker, can you believe that during the planning stage the Government claims to have hit a snag? It looks like a hotchpotch arrangement. The Government then said that because it had hit a snag with the level of the hospital that it would cost an extra \$4 million as that snag had caused a lot of problems. I understand that the Government must plan for that extra cost but I am not prepared to accept another manoeuvre from the Government. I expect people to arrive on site any day now to build that hospital.

I remind the House that Moora is the biggest centre in the electorate of Moore. To the west is the Brand Highway, which is not free of severe accidents. To the east is the Great Northern Highway, the gateway to the mining country and the great north, and one of the worst roads in Western Australia. Of course, people become concerned when they do not have the very best medical facilities and they became concerned when they read what Christine O’Farrell said. I am not critical of her; she is doing her job. I am critical of the Premier and the Treasurer because they have control of the money. I am sympathetic to the Minister for Health.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Are you?

Mr W.J. McNEE: I think I should be. If he had the opportunity, he would provide for the people in Moora. However, the Premier and the Treasurer simply will not give him the money. I think that is one of the problems.

Mr R.F. Johnson: They’re putting it all into cannabis.

Mr W.J. McNEE: We will come to that matter later today.

The Premier and the Treasurer say that they are aiming to stay on target for the construction of the hospital and that it will commence in about 18 months. The shire president believed it would start in about eight months. He will certainly not be pleased. The *Central Midlands and Coastal Advocate* stated that the minister had made a very strong commitment to a new hospital for Moora - perhaps he has - and that it will be built in two stages. I am sure the minister will agree with me that the operating theatre at that hospital is appalling.

I remind the House that Moora District Hospital has a very stable team of doctors led by Dr Bernard Chapman. The hospital offers a wonderful service. It does not have the problems that some other country towns have. According to the article, Dr Chapman said that the Department of Health’s response was disappointing. That was very moderate language from Dr Chapman because the department’s response was disappointing. Dr Chapman also said that the department’s lack of communication with the local community was disappointing. He further said -

“Meetings with the Health Department . . . were arranged for January and here it is April and they haven’t happened . . .

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker, that is one of the traits of this Government: people just get pushed around. This Government must finally face up to the fact that it must do something. What do members find the Government doing when they drive around Western Australia now? Practically nothing. I must ask what the Government is doing with the money; because it is not spending it. Will the minister tell us where it is going?

I want the minister to tell me what the plan is for Moora District Hospital from here on in. I do not want any hocus-pocus or the pea and thimble trick. I want to hear what the minister has to say and I want to hear that he will stand by what he says. I do not want the minister to get coy because the Government is bringing in its budget in May. People are entitled to know what dollars are in the budget for the hospital and he should tell them. If the dollars are not available, he should tell them because they will eventually find out. So much is said about the hospital that appears to be contradictory to what is happening.

I remind the House that Moora has one of the best aged-care complexes that I have seen. The Moora people have put their money where their mouth is in the health system and I ask the State Government to do the same.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [9.44 am]: I have visited the Moora District Hospital and, in fact, in my former role in the Police Service I was in Moora a couple of times when flooding occurred. I am therefore well aware of some of the issues at the hospital and I am well aware of the damage that was done to the hospital. I agree with the member for Moore about the state of the operating room. We have attempted to apply some band-aids to it - to use a medical pun - but it has gone past that stage and it needs redevelopment. As the member for Moore knows, money was set aside in the previous budget to deal with the first stage of the redevelopment of Moora District Hospital, which we expected to occur later this year. There is some difficulty in doing that because of a requirement to lift the level of the hospital about 0.5 of a metre for flood remediation and flood mitigation purposes. It has been found that it will not be possible to lift the level of the hospital and that it must remain at one level. The project has therefore had to go back to the drawing board.

I will not refer to the contents of the budget; that has been a tradition of this House for much longer than even the member for Moore has been a member of this House. It is enough for me to say that the timetable that Christine O'Farrell has set is pretty indicative and we will stick to it. There is, in fact, a very strong commitment to that timetable. One thing that concerned me - I am not sure whether the member for Moore is aware of this - was a letter I received on 19 March from Hon Wilson Tuckey. It is amazing to note the places where his name appears these days. The letter essentially advised me that we should not build the hospital, certainly not where it is, but should move it to another site. The letter also referred to flooding.

I thought we had an agreement with the Shire of Moora that the hospital would be redeveloped on the site and my understanding was that some flood mitigation work would be done to ensure that occurred. The residents of Moora, and the doctors - the key people involved because they work in the hospital - are more than happy with the hospital's current location. I must remind Wilson Tuckey that there have been two floods in 100 years and the last one was a 100-year flood as the result of a cyclone. The member for Moore might want to take up that matter with Wilson Tuckey because it has thrown a spanner in the works. It means that we must now look for an alternative site. Wilson Tuckey has said that under federal laws we cannot build the hospital on the site; I do not agree with that. I believe that it is up to the people and the Shire of Moora to decide where they want the hospital. Wilson Tuckey needs to go away and put his thinking cap on. I will be asking him to explain what he means by this letter. I am more than happy to give a copy of the letter to the member for Moore.

This brings me back to what the member for Swan Hills said about support from the federal Government on health issues and it is typical of the issues in the health system. It appears that any erstwhile minister in Canberra, who obviously knows absolutely nothing about the local situation, can stick his bib in and dictate exactly how I, as the state minister, should apply health services in this State. That would be fine if the federal Government gave us the money to relocate the hospital. However, I suspect Wilson Tuckey will not give us one brass razoo if we have to move the hospital to another site and I suspect there will be an imposition on the State Government and the good people of Moora in that regard.

Mr W.J. McNee: The Commonwealth Government recently assisted in the funding of a house to provide accommodation for an extra doctor.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: That is fine.

Mr W.J. McNee: You said you won't talk about this year's budget, that's fine. However, I thought moneys were allocated for this hospital in last year's budget. I don't recall whether or not they were.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Money was allocated. The member for Moore has missed the point that Chris O'Farrell explained very well. I am more than happy to table the article referred to by the member for Moore. The article that appeared in *The Central Midlands and Coastal Advocate* on 3 April 2003 stated -

The department's Executive Director Country Service, Christine O'Farrell, told the *Central Midlands Advocate*: "We are aiming to stay on target for construction work (on the hospital) commencing in about 18 months time from now."

That is my understanding and that is the advice I have been given. The project has been pushed out by 10 months - initially it was eight months - because the designers must go back to the drawing board and change all the levels, the engineering and so on. That will cost an additional \$4 million and, obviously, it will then become a budget consideration. That is why the time line has been pushed out. Unfortunately, that staging cannot be done until this year's budget is formulated and next year's estimates are locked in so that we know where we are going with it.

I return to the point I was making: I agree with the member for Moore that the federal Government supported us in the redevelopment of the hospital at Moora. However, that was done by this Government's sitting around the table with the local office in Western Australia and coming up with a model that the federal Government agreed

to. The great difficulty that we are having in supplying health services is that the federal Government is making decisions a long way away from here in Canberra generally without any consultation with the state ministers or the local people.

I can only go on the good advice I am given. There is an 18-month time frame for the redevelopment of the hospital. The really good news is that we will end up with a new hospital, not a hospital with something tacked onto it, which was thought of in the first instance as something that could be got away with.

Mr W.J. McNee: I thought that the previous Government had made that decision.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: My understanding is that it did not, and the only decision I would have to make was in relation to the site. Once the site was worked out, the decision would be made about the structure of the hospital. That has been done. I agree that Christine O'Farrell is doing a good job there and with all of the listings.

We did not look at Moora in isolation. There was an original \$3.9 million allocation, which I think was announced by when I was away last year. That allocation is locked into the current budget process. It forms part of a \$7.7 million reserve that we put in place to reconstruct not only Moora District Hospital, but also other hospitals. Some \$2.4 million has been allocated for Goomalling District Hospital, which I understand has been completed. A further \$2.4 million has been earmarked for the \$5 million redevelopment of Narrogin Regional Hospital. We will be dealing with the entire broad width of the wheatbelt.

I think I have answered the grievance succinctly. We are locked into the 18-month program. I have no reason to doubt the advice I am being given by the department. I shall be more than happy to share a copy of Hon Wilson Tuckey's letter with the member. Perhaps then we might find out why he is sticking his beak in again.