

NURSES, PAY DISPUTE

115. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

During the election campaign, the Labor Party's policy entitled "access and quality in our public hospitals" committed the Labor Party to "commencing negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) as a priority". Given that after four months of negotiations the matter has now been referred to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, does the minister concede -

- (a) that the Government has failed to deliver on its promise to resolve the nurses' pay dispute through negotiation; and
- (b) that as a result of this failure, the future management of health employment conditions and the status of the health budget now no longer lie with the minister but with the arbitration commission?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I have outlined on previous occasions the issues for negotiation between the ANF and the Government. There has been no failure. It takes two sides to negotiate, as the former minister knows full well. Every effort has been made, including almost tripling the previous Government's offer to nurses. We have changed the offer from a measly \$104 million to almost \$300 million. The question is quite properly before the arbitration commission. As I hope the member knows, there is a formal process of negotiation which we intend to honour. We have told the ANF right from day one that we will honour our commitments. There should be no concession in this matter. It is in the proper court of arbitration and that is where it will sit.