

HEALTH CARE AGREEMENT, PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS

657. Mr A.D. McRAE to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister inform the House of the progress of the negotiations on the Australian health care agreement?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for Riverton for some notice of this question. I also thank him for his involvement in alternative medicine and the very successful forum on alternative medicine that he ran the other day for groups in his electorate. It was an excellent forum and I congratulate him for it. It was a great thing to see very many people turn up.

The question is a bit of a misnomer. It was not a negotiation; it was simply an ultimatum. The federal Government proposes to reduce the growth element of the budget to States over the next five years by some five per cent.

Mr M.F. Board: How do you work that out?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is quite simple. Only two people in the whole of Australia currently support the federal Government's view of Medicare and the so-called offer that it made to the States: the president in this State of the Australian Medical Association and the member for Murdoch. They are the only two people who are saying we should support John Howard's undermining of Medicare in this country. There is no doubt about it: John Howard killed off Medicare last Monday; and on Friday Kay Patterson buried this country's public hospital system. The mathematics are very simple. If we did absolutely nothing and just stuck with the agreement that the previous Government had negotiated - with a big "N" - the States would get \$43 billion over the next five years. The proposal that the federal Government has put to us will give us \$42 billion over the next five years. I was not a terrific mathematician at school, but I know that means a reduction of \$1 billion. It is as simple as that. The member for Murdoch is saying that we are getting \$1 billion more.

Mr M.F. Board: You are, over five years.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: That makes me wonder what sort of a businessman the member for Murdoch was before he came into the Parliament.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Let me put it simply and succinctly. I will give the previous Government a little pat on the back. Over the period of the current agreement, this State has increased its contribution to health in this State by in excess of 27 per cent. That is in terms of growth. The federal Government's increase was 22 per cent over five years. The federal Government is proposing to give us 17 per cent over the next five years.

Mr M.F. Board: Real.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The other two are real as well. The member for Murdoch should read the figures. Every year since I have been Minister for Health I have had to explain to the member how to interpret the estimates; and no doubt I will have to explain it to him again this year. The Commonwealth is offering the States a real growth of less than six per cent. However, when we increase our allocation by 9.7 per cent, all we get from the member for Murdoch is carping criticism. The member for Murdoch has very conveniently ignored the fact that the offer from the Commonwealth is \$1 billion less. If the current agreement were to be continued, this State would be \$1 billion better off. The Commonwealth Government's offer, coupled with the destruction of Medicare, will cause a looming crisis in this State. I have not used that word in this Parliament until now.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The only two people in this country who are supporting John Howard's destruction of Medicare are Bernard Pearn-Rowe and the member for Murdoch. If I had a dollar for every time they have used the word "crisis" in the past two years I would not need any funding from the federal Government. John Howard has got another poodle, and he sits in Murdoch.