

COMMONWEALTH BUDGET, IMPACT ON THE STATE'S HEALTH PORTFOLIO

**1. Mr J.R. QUIGLEY to the Minister for Health:**

Could the minister please outline the impact on the health portfolio of the commonwealth budget announced last night?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

I thank the member for Innaloo for seeking this information, as opposed to the silly outbursts we get from the Leader of the National Party, who should be interested in these figures as they will impact mostly on people in rural areas.

After the very disappointing meeting state ministers held with Senator Kay Patterson the other week, the budget had no surprises whatsoever for us. The one matter now confirmed in the line items in the budget is that, over the term of the proposed agreement, the Commonwealth will provide \$1 billion less than we are currently receiving.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Obviously, the member for Murdoch, the opposition health spokesperson, has not read the line items.

Mr M.F. Board: I have. I have it here.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I will point them out for the member. It is \$108 million less in 2003-04, and \$172 million less in 2004-05. The member for Murdoch should look at the negative figures. Even with the rudimentary knowledge that his leader alongside him has, he would be able to point out to the member that brackets mean negative. It is \$264 million less in 2005-06.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You're a nasty minister.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am not nasty. What is happening to the Australian public is absolutely despicable. We are fighting now to keep public hospitals open for people who deserve emergency services. Frankly, this kind of decision adds to the burden we already must bear. Finally, \$372 million less will be provided in 2006-07. The \$1 billion is a reality. Let us look at where it will go. One need not look too far to see that Medicare is being unwound. Couple these reductions to John Howard's Medicare changes, and people will be driven back into a public hospital system that is already burdened with a load it should not have to bear.

I look up in the public gallery, and I am not sure whether any people there, looking at their faces, are on pensions. However, the incentive for local doctors to bulk-bill pensioners is \$3. Why would family doctors ever bother to bulk-bill a pensioner when they can charge any fee they like for anybody who walks through their door? I do not blame doctors for that. That is what will happen once the cap is taken off the system. I suggest that members opposite see a movie playing in town at the moment called *Bowling for Columbine*.

Mr M.F. Board: I've seen it.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I hope members opposite have seen it. As a past health minister, the member for Darling Range should hang his head in shame if he is backing John Howard's action. It is an absolute disgrace. As I said the other week, John Howard is putting in place by stealth an American system; that is, if a person does not have a credit card in hand, that person will not be treated. The member for Darling Range should hang his head in shame; he knows as a former health minister what the State is up against.