

AMBULANCE RAMPING

315. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to the litany of excuses this government has used over the past two years to explain the record ambulance ramping figures, including respiratory issues, extra cleaning, a severe flu season and, at first, outright denial that there was a problem. Given that ramping is a result of a hospital system at capacity with no beds available, why has it taken a crisis and so long for the government to admit it is failing to manage our crumbling health system and offer support to St John Ambulance?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

One thing I do know is that Labor will always manage health better than the Liberals and Nationals. We will always manage it better. The Liberals' and Nationals' DNA is that ordinary people do not deserve decent health care.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is where they start from. The Liberals' and Nationals' DNA is that it should depend on the amount of money someone has in their bank account, rather than their need. That is where they start.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member does not know the history. The Liberals and Nationals know nothing about history. They know nothing about the history of this country or the history of these issues.

I have been here a long time and I have seen it all. I can tell members that we always get better health outcomes and better investment under Labor governments than we do under Liberal governments because we want to make sure that ordinary people get decent health care.

The Leader of the Opposition said that one of the so-called excuses was respiratory issues. I do not know whether she has noticed, but we have been through a worldwide pandemic that is based on respiratory issues—that is what it is—and we have had to deal with that. I recently had some experience in a hospital with a family member. I can tell members that when staff have to deal with a patient, the changing of personal protective equipment and the protocols around that are quite extraordinary—it is quite extraordinary what has to happen—which obviously puts huge delay into the system. Every time someone comes into a room, they change their PPE every time they leave the room. It is quite extraordinary. If someone comes in six times, they have to change their PPE six times—that is just with one patient. That sort of thing is quite extraordinary. They are the protocols. We do not control those; they are the protocols that Health puts in place. Those sorts of things do put delays into the system and they are unavoidable. It happens in ambulances as well. Then at any given point in time, there are literally thousands of staff not at work because they are COVID positive or they are a close contact. As we know with our health workforce, a lot of nurses in particular, but allied staff and doctors also, have children at school who become COVID positive and they either have to look after them or they become positive themselves.

These are hard issues to deal with; they should not be glibly dismissed as though we can somehow magic androids out of the air to fill the role of trained professionals. We cannot magic androids out of the air—we cannot! The Leader of the Opposition said, “Why couldn’t you plan for this?” In terms of the St John Ambulance situation, recently, on Sunday evening, I was advised that the absenteeism rate was 40 per cent—40 per cent!—because of COVID issues. They are not easy issues to deal with. What have we done? The Leader of the Opposition talked about beds. We have committed to 530-plus additional beds since October last year, of which 340 or so have already been rolled out. An additional 1 500 or so nurses have been employed over the course of the last two years, plus 512 additional doctors.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Honestly!

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Honestly, the Liberals are so unfit for office.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There we are; there it goes. I remember when Colin Barnett was standing there—he got to stand there, but I have to stand here!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: As an act of sympathy!

At least the Liberal Party had people of substance amongst them at that point in time.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There we go; there we go.

Those are the sorts of things that we are dealing with. As I said, there are 530-plus additional beds, 1 500 nurses, 512 additional doctors, \$5.2 billion in additional spend and a massive new emergency department regime put in place.

I read the national press and I know what is happening in other states. They are dealing with exactly the same issues, but they have dealt with them for years over COVID because they had massive outbreaks in Sydney and Melbourne, which we did not have. They had thousands of people die, which we did not have. We avoided the worst of that. We have achieved our soft landing out of COVID with incredibly high vaccination rates. Our situation is one that is difficult at this point in time. In many ways, it was unavoidable because of the fact that at some point in time, COVID was going to get here, despite our best efforts. We have prepared ourselves with our vaccination rates and additional investment as best we can to cope with a difficult situation.