

Speaker; Mr Mike Board; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr John Day; Acting Speaker; Dr Geoff Gallop;  
Mr Larry Graham; Mr Kucera; Deputy Speaker

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## **HEALTH SYSTEM, GOVERNMENT'S ELECTION PROMISES**

### *Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER** (Mr Riebeling): Today I received a letter from the member for Murdoch seeking to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion -

That this House condemns the Government's failure to progress its election promises to improve the WA health system, when in fact there has been a serious deterioration under its management.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

The SPEAKER: The matter shall proceed on the usual basis.

**MR BOARD** (Murdoch) [2.59 pm]: I move the motion.

It gives me and the Opposition no joy to move such a motion in this House less than seven months after the state election. All members are aware that, today, services in Perth hospitals, particularly Royal Perth Hospital, are unavailable to our community: surgery and pharmaceutical services have been cancelled and ambulances are bypassing hospitals. Rolling strikes are planned for metropolitan hospitals, and they may move into country hospitals over the next week or two.

Dr Gallop: Do you agree with those strikes?

Mr BOARD: We do not agree with strikes.

The doctors and nurses, and now the hospital salaried officers, in this State are in conflict with the management of the health system and this Government. There is no way that we in Western Australia can be satisfied with this deteriorating situation. After the election on 10 February, every member of the Western Australian community felt that, because of the Labor Party's high-profile campaign, the Government would act with urgency and immediacy to sort out the problem.

I stand here today to condemn, not the Minister for Health personally, but the Government's lack of action some seven months after its election to office. It can hold as many reviews and talks as it wants, but it should not let the system deteriorate. While those reviews are taking place, the Government must act to maintain the standards the community expects. It is one thing to look to the future and judge how it will resolve some of the issues facing health, but, in the meantime, it should not allow the situation to deteriorate to the point at which surgery is cancelled and other health services are unavailable to the Western Australian community.

I take members back to 10 February. Health was one of the major issues in the lead-up to the state election. All the returned members of this House will recall the number of matter of public interest debates that took place and the way in which the now Government, the Labor Party, raised health issues in this House. Through the unions and this House, it worked the health issue exceptionally well. The then Opposition introduced sensitive issues in this Parliament. It talked about individual cases, such as the cancellation of one person's surgery. The Labor Party made health the highest profile issue leading into the state election. Prior to the election, it said it would fix the issues surrounding health in Western Australia. It said it would ensure that nurses, doctors and salaried officers were happy, that surgery was not cancelled and that services were returned to the Western Australian community. It said it would ensure that those areas were resourced and that there would not be a return to what had happened over the previous 12 months. I quote from an article titled "Labor pledges to fix hospital crisis" -

Labor leader Geoff Gallop made his biggest commitment of the State election campaign yesterday - to come up with solutions to all the problems in the public hospital system.

Outside Royal Perth Hospital, Dr Gallop said he would spend \$109 million of money earmarked for capital works over the next four years to upgrade emergency departments and wards at the big public hospitals and create an extra 100 beds.

Not a closure of beds but an extra 100 beds.

He said the lack of capacity in public hospitals had resulted in the critical situation where ambulances were forced to bypass big emergency departments because they were full.

Asked how Labor planned to find extra nurses needed, considering the critical shortage, he said: "You can provide beds but you also need to provide the resources for the staff. I can assure you we will be dealing with that further down the campaign trail. The Labor Party is going to come up with solutions to all of the problems in our public hospitals."

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 21 August 2001]

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What has the Government done in seven months? We see deterioration and crisis. Let me remind members of this House of the former Government's achievements in health in its eight years. Health is a very demanding area for the responsible minister; he knows it and I know it. The former Government took health from a recurrent budget of \$1.3 billion a year to \$2 billion a year. Not only did it increase the recurrent expenditure and provide extra resources and services, it built five hospitals - one is still under construction - and it upgraded 10 other major hospitals. It was a massive injection in capital works in the health system. Under the previous Government, the average recurrent expenditure increase was between six per cent and seven per cent and averaged about 6.8 per cent a year. It was a tremendous performance, given the debt that the previous Government inherited in 1993. The current Government knows that. In the lead up to the election the Labor Party chose to make health the highest profile commitment in the campaign. The Labor Party made some cheap mileage from the issue of health when it knew what the previous Government was achieving and what money and resources were being invested.

Having raised the expectations of the Western Australian community, the State's nurses, clinicians and salaried officers, what has the Government delivered? The Government has promised everything but delivered nothing. The Government is like Gaspo the balloonist: kids go up to Gaspo and say, "Great, Gaspo is in town and I'm going to get something really great - a new balloon." The balloons are stuck on the kids' noses and are filled with hot air. They end up blowing up in their faces and they have nothing - no balloon, nothing. That is what has happened. The Government is like Nero - fiddling while Rome is burning - and then it decides it will review fire services. The Government can have only so many reviews. There is a time for decisive action and the minister needs to take control and sort out the critical issues that are affecting services in our hospitals.

This side of the House knows about the difficult issues; it knows about the management of health and that is why the Metropolitan Health Service Board was put in place. It was put in place to help make difficult decisions between the acute hospitals and the secondary hospitals and to sort out the funding crises, the difficult issues between the major players and the vested interests in health. The former Government understood that. The first thing this Government did was sack the board. The Government said it did not want the board and that it did not want to make tough decisions. The Government has bowed to vested interests. What has been put in its place? Nothing, just a balloon full of hot air, and it has blown up in the Government's face.

The health system is deteriorating and every worker in the health system is against the minister.

Mr Hyde: What about the nurses?

Mr BOARD: If the minister talked to the nurses, he would find that they are upset. They have been misled by this Government and have ended up with nothing more than they were going to get before the change of Government. The doctors around the State and also the Hospital Salaried Officers Association want the health minister's blood. The minister will not meet or discuss the issues with the Hospital Salaried Officers Association but he will allow rolling strikes to occur throughout Western Australia. As a result of the minister's inability to act, services will decline.

I understand that the minister must review the hospital system. I understand what the Daube review did, and I understand where that review may lead; however, the minister must act now. Although a review is being conducted, the minister cannot allow the system to deteriorate so that a lack of services in our hospitals affects people's health. The minister must do something about the current situation. He cannot blame it on either the doctors or the lack of doctors. The health of the community is more important than disputes over territory and ownership of particular areas. The minister must act; that is the role of the minister. His job is to make sure that services are provided to the Western Australian community.

What is currently happening in the system? What is the Hospital Salaried Officers Association going through? Its members have written to the Opposition informing it that the Minister for Health will not speak to them. The minister will not negotiate with them, and they are sick of being ignored. Some six weeks ago, they gave the minister notice that they would take this action - not that we agree with this action - because the minister refused to offer a proposal and sit down and openly discuss their requirements.

Stoppages will occur throughout our hospitals. Today the Royal Perth Hospital in Wellington Street, the Shenton Park campus in Selby Street, the Swan Health Service in Middle Swan, the Bentley Health Service and the Kalamunda District Community Hospital have restricted their services to the community. They will provide outpatient services only for emergencies.

Many people in the community are disappointed and upset. On Thursday, the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the North Metropolitan Health Service will deny the community their health services. On Friday, the Princess

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Margaret Hospital for Children, of all places, will deny its services because of the lack of action taken by the minister. The minister should not allow that to happen.

Dr Gallop: What action do you suggest?

Mr BOARD: The Government should sit down with the salaried officers and work it out. On Tuesday, 28 August, the Fremantle Hospital, the Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital, the Peel Health Service and the Armadale-Kelmscott Health Service will deny their services to the community. What type of services will be denied to our community? Some of the headlines that have appeared in *The West Australian* in the past couple of weeks include "Nurse crisis hits hospital beds" and "Nurse shortage shuts ward". This Government said that it would fix the hospital system. The Labor Party asked people to vote for it because it claimed that when in Government, it would resolve the issues that faced the hospital system. The Premier said that Labor would fix the issues. He said, "Trust us; vote for us; you will not be kicked out of your hospital bed, or be denied hospital services. You will not lie in an ambulance that must bypass the hospital whose services you require because Labor will inject the funds into the system and manage it." What has happened? Seven months later, not only are those issues unresolved, but also they are deteriorating.

The situation is worse than it was 12 months ago; that is why we raised this motion today. Patients regularly bypass hospitals, there is a shortage of beds, and the elective surgery list is growing. What is the Government doing about it? It is reviewing the situation, but it is going nowhere. The minister must act right now. Another headline in *The West Australian* reads, "Hospital feels pinch of winter". A month before winter started, the Opposition raised a motion in Parliament so that the minister would act before winter. The minister must do something about the emergency services.

Another headline states, "Hospitals face cash shortfalls". What has the minister done with the capital works? What has he done with the money from the sale of AlintaGas? Why has he stopped purchases of equipment for our hospitals? Why are the hospitals cutting down their resources pending the budget? They know what will happen. I have copies of the same memorandums the minister has. The Australian Medical Association says that the health system is bleeding to death. Where is the Government on this issue? We raised this issue today and we will continue to raise it this week.

Mr Kucera: It is about time you started to act in opposition.

Mr BOARD: It gives us no joy to raise the issue. The minister should act now. He cannot go to the media, stand in front of the cameras and say that there will be another review. Why did he not get behind some of the tough decisions that the Metropolitan Health Service Board had to make?

The minister knows there must be some redistribution of the money that goes into the health system. He knows that some tough calls must be made. However, rather than making those tough calls, he is sitting behind some reviews and the Daube report. Where is it? Where are the action and the resources to make it happen? Where are the services to the community? Nothing has happened. It is a deteriorating situation. The Opposition cannot allow that to continue. Quality organisations like St John Ambulance are not political organisations; they are not out there trying to get headlines. They are saying that people are at risk unless the Government acts now. Something must be done about it.

The minister cannot blame it on the lack of doctors in certain areas. He needs to do something in a management and resourcing sense until the reviews are completed. He cannot just sit there and allow the situation to deteriorate. We will continue to raise this issue over the next few weeks. We will ensure that, come budget time, the minister provides the adequate resources. When we were in government, we averaged 6.8 per cent of recurrent funding, and the hospital system needs nine per cent. The Government does not require the same capital works injections that we made during the past four years. When we were in government, we built five hospitals and upgraded at least 10 others. Why does the Government not better resource some of the people in the system and some of the services, meet its election commitments and satisfy the Western Australian community that it has done something about the health system?

**MR BARNETT** (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [3.17 pm]: Anyone in government or in Parliament will recognise that the health portfolio is one of the more difficult ones for a number of reasons. One of those is its scale; it is a large and complex portfolio. The costs are enormous in terms of not only the total share of the budget, but also the new forms of pharmaceutical treatment, assessment and testing. The demands and expenditure on health tend to rise quicker than in almost any other area. In a State like Western Australia the administration of health and the delivery of quality health care to a dispersed population over a vast area present another unique set of challenges. Indeed, the division of responsibility between the Commonwealth and the State presents another problem.

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The Commonwealth, through Medicare and other arrangements, can largely affect the demand for health care; yet the State has a responsibility of effectively trying to supply that health care. We recognise that there are a number of very powerful, influential and, at times, outspoken interest groups within the health sector. During our eight years in government, we experienced all the challenges of managing the health system in Western Australia. Now, the Government almost seems to complain that we dare raise this issue. In government, year after year we endured Labor Party members in this Chamber continually attacking the health minister of the day - whomever that might have been - denigrating our health system and attacking people working within the health care sector.

Dr Gallop: That is not true.

Mr BARNETT: It was continuous. We can give government members pages of quotes of them attacking the public health care system across every forum. When in opposition they did everything possible to aggravate and create tension and disharmony in the health system. That is what the Government did incessantly when it was in Opposition. We can produce page after page of *Hansard* which shows that the Labor Party came into this Chamber, when in opposition, and attacked the minister and the health care system. The Labor Party did not give a damn about health care in this State, but simply sought to gain political advantage - and I suppose it did. Mr Acting Speaker, you will not find that from this Opposition. We will tackle this constructively -

Several government members interjected.

Mr BARNETT: The smug, pompous minister laughs again; but this is an important issue.

*Points of Order*

Mr KOBELKE: I ask the Acting Speaker to consider the verbal attack by the Leader of the Opposition on the minister. That attack does not sit at all with the Leader of the Opposition's statement that he would talk constructively about this issue. However, that is not the point of order. The point of order is that the Leader of the Opposition's words were a deliberate slur and attack on the minister and, therefore, were unparliamentary. The Leader of the Opposition should withdraw his remarks.

Mr DAY: I can understand that members of the Government, and particularly the minister, would not like what was said. However, the words that I think the Government is taking offence to are "smug" and "pompous." We can all have our opinions about them, but those words hardly seem to be unparliamentary. This is a bit of a try-on by the Government. It is not an unparliamentary statement, regardless of whether the Government agrees with it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Andrews): I tend to agree with the member for Darling Range. I do not think that the words reflect upon the character of the Minister for Health.

*Debate Resumed*

Mr BARNETT: There are always issues in health. One of the issues that we faced when in government was the increasing demand on the capacity of the health system. There were stories about overcrowding and the like. The previous Government responded to that, and as the member for Murdoch said, we spent something like \$600 million on expanding the capacity of the health system: the South West Health Campus; Armadale Health Service; Peel Health Campus; Broome Hospital; Joondalup Health Campus; Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital; the Northam Regional Hospital; it went on and on.

We went out into the community and spent money on building and expanding health facilities. To some extent, this Government does not have to do that. This Government does not have anywhere near the challenge of capital investment because the previous Government spent \$600 million on facilities.

What did we get from the Labor Party during the election campaign? When in opposition, the present Government continually attacked, denigrated, and rubbished our health care system. We have got a damn good health system in this State. However, we recognise that it may not reach everybody's highest expectations and that there will always be problems. The Government, when in opposition, continually sought to tear down, to attack, to divide and to destroy what it could in our health system week in, week out, month in, month out, and year in, year out. The irony now is that the Government must endure what it created. When in opposition, the Government raised expectations and it promised the world; now it has to live with the disharmony that it helped to create.

During the election campaign, the now Premier said that real solutions would be used to fix the health system under Labor. As the member for Murdoch stated, we have seen nothing. It has been six months since the election and the situation has continued on a path of deterioration. There is no doubt about that.

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I refer the Premier to his campaign launch. I will tell the House what the Premier said on health during Labor's campaign launch. The Premier said that when doctors and nurses are forced into public revolt over the management of our hospitals, that is a crisis. Dr Mountain, the Australian Medical Association spokesman, has said that Labor has done absolutely nothing over the past 6 months.

The head of the AMA, Dr Pearn-Rowe, has stated that Labor came into power on promises of increased health funding and reform but after only six months the health system is at its lowest point ever.

We have had problems with nurses and with doctors, and now the Hospital Salaried Officers Association is out on strike.

The Premier went on in his campaign speech. He said that -

... where elective surgery in the main hospitals is cancelled, that is a crisis.

Where elective surgery is cancelled, by the Premier's own definition, that is a health crisis. The situation is such that during July there was a 25 per cent cut in elective surgery at Royal Perth Hospital. The HSOA dispute has meant that 35 elective operations were cancelled today at Royal Perth Hospital alone. By the Premier's definition, that is a crisis. The Premier in his speech gave three criteria for what makes a health crisis. The first criterion was a revolt by doctors and nurses, which we have had. The second was the cancellation of elective surgery, which is happening today. The Premier said that the third measure of how a health crisis is defined was, "When ambulances are forced to drive the streets of Perth to find an emergency ward that can accept patients, that is a crisis." In February, the Premier's three-point definition of a crisis was a revolt by health workers, the cancellation of elective surgery, and the bypassing of ambulance services. That crisis exists today in our public health system in Western Australia. This did not happen last week or tomorrow; it is happening today! This crisis is happening after six months of absolute inaction by a Labor Government.

From 12 February to 6 August 2001, there were 260 ambulance bypasses; not just a couple or a few here and there. Our leading hospital, Royal Perth Hospital alone has had 80 bypasses. On 29 July, the three major teaching hospitals were on bypass together. This is the worst situation we have ever had and it is happening today. Part of the problem now is with this health minister. Anyone who takes on a large and difficult portfolio like the health portfolio will always have day-to-day problems, and sometimes big problems. However, that person should roll up his sleeves, go down and get in the pit and sort out the problem and that is what this minister should do.

This minister has shown no leadership at all. He says it is up to the bureaucrats and the arbitration commission and he says it is a pay dispute. It is not a pay dispute; it is a health crisis by his leader's definition. The member for Swan Hills is shaking her head. She should be involved in trying to sort out what is happening at Swan District Hospital. She should show some personal commitment and get out there and stop the cancellation of emergency services.

This minister is liked in the community. He is a new member of Parliament and he is an experienced person but he is not experienced in either health or public administration. The Premier should act and find someone among his ranks, like the Minister for Police and Emergency Services or someone more competent and experienced in public office, to put in charge of the health system.

**DR GALLOP** (Victoria Park - Premier) [3.28 pm]: Let me begin where the Leader of the Opposition ended. I have total confidence in the Minister for Health, as indeed do all members on this side of House. What the Leader of the Opposition said reveals the reasons that his party could not run the health system for the eight years that it was in government. It is his support for an unprofessional approach to the management of the system that is the problem. The last Government took an unprofessional approach to the management of one of the most important agencies of government. In the past, whenever the Minister for Health tried to address a problem, his colleagues and the Premier of the day went behind his back and did sweetheart deals, particularly with the Australian Medical Association. That is what used to happen in the health system. We want to make sure that the system works properly and that the issues are addressed properly.

For eight years we have had dislocation in the health system. For eight years, within the health system a culture was built up in which accountability was totally undermined. The Government will address this culture of lack of accountability, sweetheart deals between the Australian Medical Association and the Premier of the day, and his ministerial colleagues associated with the AMA undermining the Minister for Health. The Government will make sure that things work properly.

Industrial action is taking place in Western Australia today. If all the ambit claims made on the health system by the AMA, the nurses and the Hospital Salaried Officers Association were added together, they would cost \$1.2 billion over four years, without adding to the system one extra doctor, nurse, or speech pathologist, and

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without creating one extra bed. The Opposition says the Government should cave in to those demands. The Opposition will be judged by this statement.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Andrews): I call the House to order. The level of interjections from those on my left has reached a point at which I cannot follow what is being said, and I certainly cannot hear the interjections.

Dr GALLOP: The Government will not cave in to those demands. The Government stands for an improved health system, and wants to work with the nurses, the doctors and HSOA members to bring about that improvement. The Government sat down with the nurses and came up with a solution to the problem, which was acknowledged by everyone before the election as a special case. The doctors present a much harder issue. The Opposition, when in government, negotiated a deal with the doctors about salary packaging. The then Opposition warned the Government about these sorts of arrangements. The Government of the time did not listen, and entered into arrangements which are now falling down. The Opposition is condemned by those salary packaging arrangements, and now the Government must work through, with the doctors, an arrangement that will not bankrupt Western Australia. The same issue now faces the Government in the dispute with the HSOA. I remind members that HSOA members in this State have been offered a nine per cent salary increase, with other conditions on top of that.

The Government is dinkum about improving the management of the health system, and is serious about a professional approach, no sweetheart deals, no ministers being undermined by others, and without the Premier going behind the back of the minister. The Government now has a professional approach to health management. People working within the health system have become hooked on an unprofessional approach, and the Government must ease them away from that approach. That will not happen without some conflict. That is why the Government stood up to the AMA, and is now standing up the HSOA.

The Opposition said the present Government would cave in to the unions. I remember all the rhetoric. Now that the Government is standing up to the unions, which side of the fence is the Opposition on? Is it on the side of those people seeking to access the health system?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Andrews): I call the House to order, both to my left and to my right. Far too many people are talking across the benches. The Premier has the call.

Dr GALLOP: Is the Opposition on the side of a Government which says to the managers of the health system, as it says to school principals, officials of the Department of Sport and Recreation, and managers in Main Roads, that the system will be managed through the budget allocation? Is the Opposition on the side of the public interest and the taxpayers, or is it still on the side of the approach it adopted when in government - unprofessional, sweetheart deals, decay and dislocation? The Government will refocus the health system, so that the first and most important issue is the welfare of patients and others who use that system.

Mr Barnett: That is what this debate is all about.

Dr GALLOP: No it is not. If it is, why does the Opposition not support the Government in the argument with the HSOA? The Opposition is weak. The Government stands up to the AMA and the HSOA; which side is the Opposition on?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Andrews): The Leader of the Opposition - the Premier has the call. I am very conscious of trying to give voice to those on my left, but it is reaching the point at which I need to start naming people. I prefer to allow opposition members to have their voice, but at this moment the Premier has the floor.

Dr GALLOP: Change is very challenging. The Government is trying to bring about change in the health system, so that its big machinery is working for the patients, not for the doctors or other employees of the system. The patients are the people who use the system. That sort of change is challenging. When a group of people asks the Government to pay it an amount of money so large that it will reduce the amount of money available to the patients, the Government will not agree. The Government will stand up for the public interest. The people of Western Australia now know that a clear division exists, between an Opposition that has no ideas at all for the future of the health system, and a Government that will stand up for the public interest and make sure that value is obtained for the money that goes into the health system. I can assure members and the general public that the Government will not cave in to unreasonable demands. There will be no sweetheart deals with the AMA, and the Premier will not go behind the back of the Minister for Health. Other ministers will not be allowed to undermine the Minister for Health, as was the case with the former Minister for Labour Relations, Graham Kierath, who undermined the former Minister for Health on many occasions.

The Government will make sure that accountability mechanisms are in place, so that people with responsibility for spending money, do so properly. The Government will do all those things. Will the Opposition be in favour

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of those changes, which represent the public interest, or will it oppose them, and fall further out of favour with the people of Western Australia, who are looking to the Government to bring about these changes?

**MR DAY** (Darling Range) [3.39 pm]: No one in the Opposition is suggesting for one moment that the Government should cave in to demands presented by unions in the health sector or anywhere else. The Premier has attempted to mislead, in portraying the Opposition as simply siding with union ambit claims. Some of the claims are over the top, but the Government does have a responsibility to sit down with the relevant organisations and work through the issues. I empathise with the position that the Minister for Health and other members of the Government are in.

These issues are complex. They are not easy to work through. I know that some of the tactics used by some of the organisations, whether by the Australian Medical Association or others, are indefensible.

Dr Gallop: Hear, hear!

Mr DAY: In my experience, the Hospital Salaried Officers Association is one of the more reasonable and considered organisations. For its members to be taking this sort of strike action today - for the first time in 46 years - it must be -

Dr Gallop: Are you supporting them?

Mr DAY: I am not supporting all their claims. I am saying that it is a clear indication of the substantial frustration that exists in what normally is a moderate and responsible union. There is a lot I could say on this issue. It is much broader than -

Dr Gallop: You could write a book about how you were undermined.

Mr DAY: I could indeed, and I might one day. This is much broader than a simple industrial relations problem. It is an indication of the lack of overall leadership and proper structure in the health system. When it was in opposition, the Labor Party made the simplistic promise to tear up the metropolitan health service. The AMA pushed for that for various reasons, which we will debate on another occasion. The Labor Party went along with that for simplistic and populist reasons. It is now in government and knows that it needs something like the metropolitan health service. The Labor Party is running around working out how to put something like that in place, without calling it the metropolitan health service. As I said last year, what matters most is not so much the structure of the system, but what is delivered on the ground. As the member for Murdoch said, despite all the rhetoric of the Labor Party, the previous Government delivered a great deal to improve health services in Western Australia over the past eight years.

This problem is an indication of the substantial malaise and turmoil that exists in the health system at the moment, whether it be in the Department of Health or in the health services that provide hospital and other services around Western Australia. That information has come to me from a number of sources. The Government tore up the metropolitan health service and moved out senior staff, including the Commissioner of Health. At the very least, it has not encouraged experienced people such as the former Commissioner of Health to stay around.

Mr Kucera: He chose to go; do not denigrate him.

Mr DAY: I am not denigrating him. The Government has not encouraged people with substantial experience to stay. Those people could have helped deal with this sort of problem. The acting Commissioner of Health, Bryant Stokes, is an extremely competent and dedicated officer and I have the highest respect for him, but he cannot be expected to work miracles, nor can other competent staff in the Department of Health or elsewhere, when no appropriate framework or structure is in place.

The Government must admit that there is a substantial vacuum at the moment, which in part has led to this situation at Swan District Hospital. I do not have time to go through all the issues at Swan District Hospital, but one that should be drawn to the attention of the House and the public is the impact on not only health services, but also police resources. The Police Service has expressed concern that any mental health patients who would normally be taken to the emergency department at Swan District Hospital after hours or on Sundays must now be taken to Royal Perth Hospital. That will remove a police vehicle and two police officers from the Midland region for up to seven hours. This is a major problem both locally and broadly. The Government must show some leadership and must fix the problem.

**MR GRAHAM** (Pilbara) [3.43 pm]: I will not vote for this motion and I will explain why. I want to quickly refer to some health issues that have arisen in the north west of this State. I am somewhat bemused by the emotional rhetoric that slips into health debates that involve the city. When my wife had terminal cancer, we moved to Perth from Port Hedland to provide her with access to health services. We chose to move to suburban

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Morley because it was close enough to my family to be useful, but far enough away not to be living on their doorsteps. However, it put us within 15 minutes of four first-class hospitals, one of which was Swan District Hospital. Not one place in country Western Australia has the choice of one first-class hospital, but now the city has a crisis because one minor hospital is closing out of hours for industrial or other reasons. That is the disgrace that is the health service of Western Australia.

When the other side was in government and the former member for Albany was the Minister for Health, I had a series of meetings with other members of Parliament and the Commissioner of Health. A health study was undertaken in the north west of Western Australia, which showed that the health outcomes of that region were the worst in this State, and arguably the worst in the nation. To give that minister great credit, he put a comprehensive health plan together to deliver health services to the north west of this State. It needed \$45 million in funding for its full implementation. In its quest for \$45 million, it fell \$44 million short. We were robbed of \$44 million because that money was diverted to suburban hospitals in Perth, where the need was not so great.

I am not out to bash city people and city hospitals, but I get sick to death of the rhetoric of health crises. I would love the north west to have a health crisis like that in Perth. I would love people in that region to have a choice of four first-class hospitals. However, what is happening? In the past 18 months, three general practitioners have left Port Hedland and none have returned. No doctor in a town of 13 000 people will bulk-bill. The hospital's emergency service practice has been restricted, so people can no longer use the emergency service in the way that they did 20 years ago when there was a shortage of GPs. Karratha and Dampier - which are not in my electorate - have lost three doctors over the same period. The two biggest towns in the north west have lost six general practitioners. There is no 24-hour service whatsoever. It is not a case of ambulances bypassing a hospital; there is not one there. That is what annoys me and drives me batty about these stupid debates and the blame shifting that goes on in politics.

I listened with great interest yesterday to the Prime Minister, John Howard, who said that the Northern Territory election had nothing to do with the federal Government. He said that health was the big issue and it resulted from State Governments stealing the health dollars that the federal Government allocated to improve hospitals. Everyone pooh-poohed and haw-hawed that suggestion and said it was a load of nonsense. However, that was exactly what Carmen Lawrence said when she was the federal Minister for Health and Richard Court was the Premier of Western Australia. What the hell is going on? The north west of this State has the lowest Medicare expenditure for each person of any identifiable region in Australia, but the health outcomes are the worst of any identifiable region in Australia. They are not my figures, but the figures of the Health 2020 plan that the previous Government commissioned. It is absolute nonsense and it is time this place and these responsible people shut up and got on with their jobs.

**MR KUCERA** (Yokine - Minister for Health) [3.48 pm]: I have listened to this debate with great interest. I compliment the member for Pilbara on what he has said. I have spent a considerable amount of time in the north and I know that the region enjoys far less than is enjoyed down here. There has been a lot of rhetoric and shouting today. One of the things that has disappointed me since I entered this House has been the lack of statesmanship shown. I have seen a fine example of that today. I consider the denigration of me by the Leader of the Opposition to be a badge of courage because it shows that he thinks we are doing things properly. We have inherited a raft of issues from previous health minister after previous health minister. I take the Premier's point and congratulate him and Cabinet on the support and strength they are giving me. I emphasise that I appreciate the agony the previous minister must have suffered as a result of the Australian Medical Association's undermining of his efforts.

I will deal with four or five issues in this debate. I refer first to the health culture generally within not only this State but also this great country of ours. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that the culture in health is one of denigration. Never have I been associated with a group of people so hell-bent on denigrating either part of the system or the whole system simply to get what they want. I have neither heard of nor seen that occurring elsewhere in my 36 years working in government. In the culture from which I came, during a crisis everybody pulled together and became part of the solution. They created an environment in which action could be taken.

Mr Board interjected.

Mr KUCERA: Rather than blow up balloons at circuses, member for Murdoch, this Government will seek to achieve concrete goals. The Health Administration Review Committee report, to which I have referred, highlights -

Mr Board interjected.



Speaker; Mr Mike Board; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr John Day; Acting Speaker; Dr Geoff Gallop;  
Mr Larry Graham; Mr Kucera; Deputy Speaker

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Mr KUCERA: I am more than happy to live with my team, because it will not undermine me in the way that the member for Murdoch undermined his Minister for Health. I am quite prepared to deal with these issues and to wear the mantle of leadership, as I have done for many years. The mantle of leadership in this House does not need a colour or to belong to one side of the House; it needs a real commitment to this community. That is what this Government is setting out to provide. The member for Murdoch mentioned Michael Daube, who leads a team of eminent people, such as Fiona Stanley and Dr Simon Towler, from the AMA.

I agree with the member for Murdoch that Dr Towler's comments last year undermined the good work of the previous Minister for Health concerning the Metropolitan Health Service Board. The board was not all bad. I met with the fine bunch of people who comprised the MHSB. They were working against a process and culture that has been ingrained in this country since the day a doctor got off the first boat that landed here. To learn about that members should read *A Strife of Interests*, a fine book written by an Australian. Simon Towler said in November last year -

In terms of quality and affordability of care, our health system ranks among the best in the world. However, we will continue to look at ways to improve the system and these latest changes are a further demonstration of that commitment.

The changes this Government makes will be no different. The comments of those six eminent people in this report lay down a pure framework within which to move ahead. The culture of denigrating our health system cannot continue across this fair country. What did we hear yesterday? Rather than hear constructive comments from the leader of this country - the member for Pilbara was right - we heard him say, and I quote -

Year after year, you have seen state governments thieving money from public hospitals . . .

Does the member for Murdoch agree that when the member for Darling Range was Minister for Health he was thieving money from the public hospital system? What a nonsense. It is about time the leader of the country stood up and acknowledged that until we pull together on health in this country we will get nowhere.

Mr Board interjected.

Mr KUCERA: The member for Murdoch should listen. Rather than dredge up newspaper reports he should look at what is being done. This report offers a firm way forward, but it requires a new director general of health. To denigrate the leadership of health is to cast a slur on the man who is currently leading it. He is a fine doctor. The structure of health in this State must change. The Metropolitan Health Service Board acknowledged that the system should move towards the establishment of area health authorities to break the dictatorship of various health sectors so that staff can be moved around in times of crisis. What would I do if a Cessna aircraft came down in Guildford next week outside the Swan District Hospital? Would I refuse to go out there? No, I would not. The difficulties in the health system will be addressed; the Government will work towards resolving them. We cannot resolve the problems in health until the fundamental structure of health in this State is improved. Reform and resources are clear issues.

Mr Day: Will you create an ability to appoint doctors to other hospitals?

Mr KUCERA: Certainly. The member for Darling Range should read the report. I am pleased to see he has a copy of it. I am prepared to supply the rest of the opposition front bench with a copy. The member for Darling Range knows from personal, bitter experience and the denigration of his efforts the difficulties of taking on the doctors union. I have no qualms about taking on the mantle of leadership.

Mr Kobelke: You have the strength and ability to win through.

Mr KUCERA: I will. The member for Murdoch referred to happy doctors, happy nurses and a happy Hospital Salaried Officers Association. I am talking about happy patients, the people for whom the care system is supposed to operate.

Several members interjected.

Mr Barnett: Elective surgery has been cancelled; they are not happy people.

Mr KUCERA: I also remind members opposite that three enterprise bargaining agreements have been running simultaneously, one of which - the nurses EBA - was signed off last week. Their increase will not amount to \$104 million, the paltry sum the mob opposite said those fine men and women should be paid. The amount we negotiated is \$300 million.

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr KUCERA: I am on my feet; this is my time in the debate.

Speaker; Mr Mike Board; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr John Day; Acting Speaker; Dr Geoff Gallop;  
Mr Larry Graham; Mr Kucera; Deputy Speaker

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The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Andrews): I call the Leader of the Opposition to order.

Mr KUCERA: The Premier made a very good point about the three EBAs being in progress together.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition to order.

Mr KUCERA: I say to the member for Pilbara and all the country members in this House that the Premier made a very good point. To meet claims, almost \$800 million must be found from within the health system. As the Premier said, not one cent of that money will contribute to services on the ground. How do we provide the necessary level of service to people in the Pilbara when we are putting money in the pockets of pressure groups within the health system? This debate is not about hip replacements; it is about hip pockets.

I can assure people that once those three pay claims are locked in, the crisis will be like the balloon the member for Murdoch spoke about; it will disappear. As the Premier said, unless we move past these wage claims towards reform that does not allow anyone to denigrate the system, these difficult issues will not change. As I said, I am prepared to take on that leadership and to move forward.

I refer now to resources around this State generally. Last week, the New South Wales Government received a report that was commissioned on emergency health management. The report lays out clearly the levels of emergency health management that must be conducted across the State. The member for Pilbara was right: if we took on board the viewpoint being expressed about Swan District Hospital, we would not have emergency sectors in this State. There must be a balance. There must be a way of moving forward with the resources in this State, and that must be linked to a clear reform process in the health area. It must be realised that, in some instances, we are living in the 1860s and trying to cope with twenty-first century technology.

The reform and profound change that must happen within the system will not be without pain. I do not resilé from that. It also will not be without pain for me. I had a little chuckle when those on the other side said I was stressed and under pressure. Of course I am under pressure: I took on a challenge. I took on that challenge with relish, and it will probably last me eight years - not four years. This challenge must be taken, and a clear direction is needed.

Opposition members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call the House to order.

Mr KUCERA: I must have shaken a telephone line.

I listened to my predecessor. He said that some claims are over the top. The previous minister probably does not need to be reminded - because he has been there and done that - that a process of negotiation exists. The member for Murdoch and the Leader of the Opposition claimed that the previous minister negotiated with different unions. However, this minister will not stand on the front steps of Parliament House and blubber. This minister will take a leadership role.

Mr Barnett: Who did that?

Mr KUCERA: The Leader of the Opposition should think back two ministers. I will not cry on the front steps. I will take a leadership role. I have taken a leadership role and, with the support of this Cabinet, will continue to take that leadership role. I have the support of a fine group of people in the Caucus in this State. I will not be undermined and pushed over by people who can approach the Australian Medical Association. There is pain in this issue, but I am prepared to stand and negotiate. A proper negotiating process is in place. The Minister for Labour Relations constantly reminds me of that negotiating process, which is properly done in the Industrial Relations Commission in this State.

Mr Board: You must have learnt a new language. You went to government school!

Mr KUCERA: I learn very quickly, because I am prepared to get on the front foot and talk to people. I met a fine bunch of young doctors and consultants at Swan District Hospital on Saturday morning. I listened to their problems. I listened to them tell me that no extra staff were supplied when the west wing opened and that the hospital is still struggling with the same staffing levels. I listened to those doctors tell me how young doctors coming out of our training institutions would be rotated through Princess Margaret Hospital so they could learn paediatrics and be able to help the people serviced by Swan District Hospital. That process was stopped 12 months ago.

Mr Day: By whom?

Mr KUCERA: The member should tell me; he was the Minister for Health at the time. That is one of the things into which I am inquiring.

Speaker; Mr Mike Board; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr John Day; Acting Speaker; Dr Geoff Gallop;  
Mr Larry Graham; Mr Kucera; Deputy Speaker

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I listened to those young doctors tell me about the pressures they face. I know what those pressures are, because I am prepared to go out and talk to real people and not simply read things in the newspapers. We have laid down a clear direction for health reform in this State. I have spoken with the member for Murdoch in this House on many occasions. He has said this is a bipartisan issue that needs to be shared. I invite him to work with us.

Mr Board: This motion is about today, not the future. We agree that major issues need to be resolved, but this motion is about today's problems.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would appreciate it if only one person spoke at a time to make it easier for Hansard, me and others interested in the debate.

Mr KUCERA: Dredging through the various newspapers published in this town seems to be the only research the member for Murdoch does. I suggest he talk to the people on the ground. I have said that to him on previous occasions.

Mr Board: You have already acknowledged that I am doing that.

Mr KUCERA: He should do it more often. He should also read our direction statement.

Mr Board: Talk about today's deteriorating situation.

Mr KUCERA: The member should talk about the direction in which we are going and allow leadership in this process to develop. He should allow us to develop these issues and to move away from the culture of denigration. The Premier outlined that process.

I inherited five disparate health systems in this State, which must be brought together. Swan District Hospital needs 31 general practice doctors. Those doctors cannot be obtained from anywhere in this country. Yesterday I received e-mails and faxes from as far away as South Africa from people who desperately want to come here. We will work with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to get them here. We will work with the federal Government to ensure sufficient places exist in our universities for young doctors. We will work with anybody who wants to work with us to change the system. We need to change the culture and structure of health to ensure that, for once, it has some leadership.

Mr Day: Did you say during question time that you have declared Swan Hills an area of unmet need?

Mr KUCERA: I am advised by the Commissioner of Health that, for emergencies, it is an area of declared need. The general area is not.

Mr Day: Is it not the general area?

Mr KUCERA: No; I understand that at this stage, the entire area is not one of declared need, although an application has been submitted.

Mr Day: Are the shortages in the Shires of Mundaring and Kalamunda?

Mr KUCERA: I cannot answer that; but I know that the area serviced by the emergency department has been declared an area of unmet need.

I inherited five disparate systems. The Metropolitan Health Service Board was not working, for a raft of reasons. It needed to be restructured.

Mr Board: You would not let it work.

Mr KUCERA: The member for Murdoch knows it was not working. We could not continue down that track. Six to eight years ago, our public health system was declared the best public health system in the world; it is now considered one of the worst. We have inherited that. We have a range of systems. We have a private system that does not work.

Mr Barnett: You have just said that our health system is one of the worst in the world. The Minister for Health has just said that in this Parliament. It is on the public record.

Mr KUCERA: That is what the Opposition is telling us. I did not say that.

Mr Barnett: You have labelled this one of the worst systems in the world. That is a disgrace.

Mr KUCERA: No, I did not. I said -

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call this House to order, and ask that we have only one speaker at a time, or I will start formally naming people.

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 21 August 2001]  
p2417e-2428a

Speaker; Mr Mike Board; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Mr John Day; Acting Speaker; Dr Geoff Gallop;  
Mr Larry Graham; Mr Kucera; Deputy Speaker

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Mr KUCERA: The public health system includes things like the Quit campaign. That was recognised as one of the best preventive programs in the world. It is now well behind the eight ball. I have inherited that. That needs to be changed, both culturally and structurally. That has been clearly outlined. I did not say that the public health system is the worst in the world; that was the Leader of the Opposition's interpretation. He is the disgrace.

Mr Barnett: You said the health system is one of the worst in the world. That is what you said. We all heard it. Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order.

Mr KUCERA: I remind the Leader of the Opposition about my statement on statesmanship. He does not know the meaning of the word.

Mr Barnett: Yes I do. Do you deny what you said?

Mr KUCERA: I deny it. I said "the public system" - that is about prevention.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (21)

Mr Ainsworth	Mr Day	Mr Masters	Ms Sue Walker
Mr Barnett	Mrs Edwardes	Mr Omodei	Dr Woollard
Mr Birney	Mrs Hodson-Thomas	Mr Pandal	Mr Bradshaw ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr Board	Mr Johnson	Mr Sullivan	
Dr Constable	Mr McNee	Mr Sweetman	
Mr Cowan	Mr Marshall	Mr Waldron	

Noes (29)

Mr Andrews	Mr Hyde	Mr McRae	Mrs Roberts
Mr Brown	Mr Kobelke	Mr Marlborough	Mr Templeman
Mr Carpenter	Mr Kucera	Ms Martin	Mr Watson
Mr Dean	Mr Logan	Mr Murray	Mr Whitely
Mr D'Orazio	Ms MacTiernan	Mr O'Gorman	Ms Quirk ( <i>Teller</i> )
Dr Edwards	Mr McGinty	Mr Quigley	
Dr Gallop	Mr McGowan	Ms Radisich	
Mr Hill	Ms McHale	Mr Ripper	

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Pair

Mr Edwards

Mr Bowler

Question thus negatived.