

ST JOHN AMBULANCE, RESPONSE TIMES

450. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to his recent claims that St John Ambulance had failed to inform him of issues currently affecting ambulance response times in Western Australia.

- (1) Is it true that the minister had not met with St John Ambulance staff for five months?
- (2) Will the minister confirm that Western Australia spends an average of \$8 a person on ambulance services compared with \$30 a person in other States and Territories of Australia?
- (3) Will the minister also confirm that ambulance response times may have blown out to over 10 minutes for urgent cases, which is two minutes greater than they were two years ago?
- (4) Is it true that Western Australia is the only State that does not subsidise its seniors for the use of ambulance services?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(4) Again, the hypocrisy of this member amazes me. Two and a half years ago the previous Government contracted St John Ambulance in this State to supply ambulance services to this State as an outside contractor, together with another private contractor who, incidentally, happens to be a constituent of the member for Murdoch. That private contractor was essentially given that part of the contract out of which St John Ambulance was expecting to make a decent flow of cash. However, at the end of the day, that is by the bye.

Similar to every other private agency in this State, St John Ambulance is contracted to supply a service. It gives the Government a regular update on what has happened on a quarterly basis. The last report I received from St John Ambulance was in September last year, which is a normal system. If the blow-out in response times is 11 seconds, I would expect St John Ambulance to make sure that those kinds of things are built into the contractual arrangements it makes with the Government. It is as simple as that.

Mr M.F. Board: It says that there is a lack of funding and not enough paramedics.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: If there is a lack of funding and if there was a lack of vision and a lack of projection in the arrangements that the previous Government entered into, whom do we blame for that? Do we blame the hardworking people at St John Ambulance, the volunteers and the rest of the people who support the system? No, we blame that penny-pinching bunch on the other side who do not know how to contract a decent set of services. It is as simple as that. Is it not amazing that with everything to do with health in this State, every time we start to get into contractual arrangements, whether it be with doctors, nurses or ambulance services, a crisis looms in the system? Usually that is driven by the absolute neglect of the system by those opposite when in government. Instead of the member for Murdoch casting aspersions, why does he not simply talk to his federal colleague about her turning up at a meeting that guarantees that this State gets the money it should so that it can afford a decent ambulance service?

Finally, this is the kind of misleading information that we heard introduced into this House yesterday in the debate about the Minister for the Environment and Heritage by the Opposition. The member for Murdoch knows quite well that the arrangements for funding ambulance services in this State are totally different from that in other States in Australia. I am happy to bring into this House and table the report the member referred to - the productivity report - because it clearly states that great caution should be taken when comparing an ambulance service in one State with that in another because the funding arrangements are totally different. I suggest that the member read the rest of the report instead of quoting passages from the *Sunday Times*.