

NO PRIVATISATION OF MIDLAND HEALTH CAMPUS BILL 2011

Second Reading

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.17 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Gallop and Carpenter Labor governments implemented an ambitious reform program to improve health care in Western Australia. Under the guidance of the Reid report, WA Labor revolutionised health care in Western Australia, including the most comprehensive building redevelopment program and the reconfiguring of metropolitan hospital services, with a series of modern general hospitals in the outer suburbs complementing larger, higher care tertiary services closer to the city. In short, WA Labor has a vision for a quality and accessible public healthcare system for the people of Western Australia.

In Midland, the WA Labor health reform agenda saw plans for a new general hospital to serve the people of Midland and surrounding districts. Although, ably served by the staff at the Swan District Hospital Campus, the view was that the community deserved a new hospital facility that better met the demands of a modern health system. The election of the Barnett government saw the planned new Midland health campus delayed and then targeted to be the next facility to be privatised by the Barnett government. The WA Labor opposition has observed with increasing disquiet the Barnett government's continued agenda to privatise the WA public health system and to wind back the successes of the Reid report and WA Labor's vision. The Barnett government has no mandate to carry out its privatisation program. It did not consult the public sector health workforce, or more importantly, the WA electorate. At no stage during the last election did the Liberal Party say that it would engage in an aggressive privatisation program of the Western Australian health system. The people of Western Australia were never told that a Barnett government would privatise the health system, but privatise it has, and privatise it will. WA Labor will not stand by and watch this privatisation agenda go unchallenged. WA Labor stands ready to oppose the Barnett government's privatisation agenda. We stand ready to oppose the Barnett government's sell-off of our health system and we stand ready to ensure that essential public services stay in public hands. WA Labor has listened to the people of Midland; we have listened to the doctors, nurses, orderlies and support staff of the Swan District Hospital Campus and we have listened to the people of Western Australia. We know people want to see their essential public services improved and not sold off to the private sector.

Today, WA Labor takes pride in introducing a bill to protect our WA public health service from the Barnett government. Today I introduce the No Privatisation of Midland Health Campus Bill 2011. The bill is concise and focused in its aim. This bill will outlaw the privatisation of the management and development of services at the new Midland health campus. This bill will ensure that the Barnett government does not get away with its essential health services sell-off. This bill will ensure that the Barnett government's bad decisions to privatise our health system are not carried out.

WA Labor opposes privatisation of essential health services for five very important principled reasons. First, we believe health services should be run to a standard and not a contract, or profit. Second, we believe that once services are privatised, inevitably staff, wages and conditions will suffer. We want to see an efficient health service, but not at the expense of the workers, whom Labor values very highly, and whose wages and conditions we want to see improved, not diminished. Third, we believe that those health services should be run by the public for the public, ensuring that the government of the day is accountable to the people of Western Australia for those services. I note that just yesterday in this place, the Minister for Health refused to detail any evidence to support the use of taxpayers' resources to allow private companies to profit from our public health services. The secrecy that shrouds these hospital contracts is bad public policy, and it is bad for Western Australia's accountable health system. The Barnett government promised us open and accountable government, but all it has given us is a government that seeks to avoid public scrutiny. Fourth, we want a public health system that is capable of delivering world-class hospital care and can respond to the changing needs of the Western Australian community. Privatisation undermines our capacity and skills to manage our healthcare system by giving the healthcare mission to a private operator, rather than maintaining that mission under the control of a responsive and accountable government. Fifth, we want our health services to respond in a system-wide and coordinated way, not as a series of disjointed contracts. Governments should have a vision for health care, not simply a notion for contract management.

When last in government, the Court Liberal government sought to privatise our hospital services in the Peel and Joondalup areas by selling those particular hospitals to private operators. The experience of that privatisation agenda under the Court Liberal government has not been a happy one, and nor will the experience of the privatisation of Midland health campus under the Barnett Liberal government be a happy one. No-one wants to see a repeat of the unhappy experience of the first two owners of Joondalup Health Campus, The incidents that occurred in that hospital were regrettable and call into question the very policies that put the privatised operator

model in place. It took lengthy coronial inquests to unravel the confusion between private operation and public obligation, and to get to the bottom of those issues to do with responsibility and accountability. No-one wants to repeat the poisonous conflict between the management of Peel Health Campus and the staff of that hospital that has so often flared in the past.

The Barnett Liberal government looks to Joondalup Health Campus as an example of where privatisation works. But we say that the successes of Joondalup Health Campus are not intrinsic to the privatisation process but rather are entirely coincidental to it. The work done by the chief executive officer of that hospital, Mr Kempton Cowan, and his team to retrieve the heavily damaged reputation of that hospital from its early days of operation is a credit to their individual endeavours, but not a credit to the policies of previous Liberal governments.

In sharp contrast, the minister is keen to divert the Parliament and public's attention from the privatisation that has taken place at Peel Health Campus. Despite the late improvement in employer–employee relations at that hospital, there is still a long way to go before Peel Health Campus can confidently say that it has met the expectations and standards of the workers in that hospital and the people of Mandurah and surrounding districts whom it serves. I do not know why the Barnett Liberal government wants to put the people of Midland through the same anxieties and experiences that were borne by the people of Peel and Joondalup. But I note that the people of that community absolutely oppose the policies to privatise that hospital, and oppose the policies of the Barnett Liberal government.

Today, WA Labor, as it has often done in its long and proud history, will make a stand for the community of Midland. We will take a stand for the workers of Swan District Hospital. We will take a stand for the people of Midland and the surrounding districts. We will continue to oppose this privatisation, and we will do so because we know that it is a bad decision and we know that it is the wrong decision. In a state as wealthy as ours, the government should not seek to sell off the essential services that we have come to rely on to look after the health of our families. The government should seek ways to ensure that all Western Australians benefit from the boom economy. One of the best ways it can do that is to improve our hospitals, not sell them off and sell out the people who work in them.

WA Labor has previously introduced legislation in this place to stop the privatisation of our essential public services. The last bill was criticised by some members, because although they agreed with the principle of the bill, they thought it too wide in its application. The No Privatisation of Midland Health Campus Bill will provide those members with an opportunity to stand by the intent of that criticism and now support this very focused and concise legislation to stop the destructive privatisation policies being implemented in relation to Midland health campus. The bill will also provide an opportunity for those members who represent people in the Midland health campus service area to oppose the privatisation of their local hospital. The community will carefully watch how they vote to see whether they will stand up for health care in their community by supporting this bill.

The current Swan District Hospital is a functioning hospital, with staff dedicated and working together to deliver high-quality health care to the people of Midland and the districts that surround it. These services go throughout the eastern suburbs of Perth and into the Wheatbelt. It is these staff, and their commitment to these areas, who are now in jeopardy. The privatisation of the proposed Midland health campus represents a threat to the care mission to this wider community. This bill will protect health services in Midland health campus. I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman**.