

COUNTRY HEALTH CARE PLAN – June 18, 2008

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:32): I rise today to make a few comments about the destruction of country health as overseen by the current Labor government. I note Minister Hill was quite keen to portray headlines in country papers that allegedly show that people are not upset about the Country Health Care Plan. Well, I have *The River News* of 12 June stating 'Hospital services will go' and containing the following comments:

[Rural Doctors Association of South Australia] president Dr Steve Holmes says what the South Australian government's Country Health Care Plan will really do is destroy hospital and health services in small rural communities across the state.

He says it also threatens to drive doctors and other rural health professionals out of country areas and rip the heart and soul from small towns.

Since news of the plans was released, some doctors have already threatened to leave rural towns.

Also, *The Murray Valley Standard* of Murray Bridge on 13 June stated in an article:

The Rural Doctors Association is questioning how the state government created its Country Health Care Plan, which will see six Murraylands hospitals re-badged with a new title.

The hospitals at Mannum, Meningie, Taillem Bend, Lameroo, Karoonda and Pinnaroo will become GP Plus emergency hospitals -

and I note that these are all hospitals in my electorate or servicing my electorate of Hammond,

- along with more than 30 hospitals across the state.

The Murray Bridge Hospital will remain the health care 'hub' for the region, as a country community hospital.

[Rural Doctors Association] of Australia president and Murray Bridge general practitioner Dr Peter Rischbieth said he was concerned about the pressure put on 'hub' hospitals to cater for patients coming from outlying areas for treatment. 'If more and more of the patients have to travel to Murray Bridge, how will that affect the workforce there,' Dr Rischbieth said.

He said many South Australian doctors had called the RDA to complain about the impact of the health care plan. 'This has been devised by metropolitan bureaucrats and imposed on rural communities,' Dr Rischbieth said. 'We believe this decision has been done without proper consultation with rural clinicians.'

Dr Rischbieth and RDA of South Australia president Dr Steve Holmes met with Health Minister John Hill on Tuesday to put 11 questions to him about the consultation and decision making process that led to the plan. The RDA has given the government a week to reply to questions.

I note the heading in the *Murray Pioneer* of 11 June, 'More hurt for 'other' hospitals?'. The Minister for the River Murray, the member for Chaffey, signed off on this plan in cabinet. The article states that Berri will get a \$41 million expansion, but they will be left with bandaid centres at Waikerie, Renmark, Barmera and Loxton.

As a country member, I am really concerned about what is happening to country health in South Australia. Recently, I was very impressed when I stayed at Wilpena Pound for a couple of days. One of my lads was sick and we had to go to Hawker to seek the help of the hospital and the local doctor. There was another family there with a young lad who needed the same assistance. On a Sunday morning, a doctor who had been based at Hawker for only two weeks was more than happy to come out and provide that service. Where will that service be in the future?

I thought that was exemplary service in a country hospital—far better than that received by my father-in-law, who recently had to attend the emergency department in one of

the city hospitals and wait for hours by a door that was being opened and closed all the time before he could receive proper care.

It is a fallacy to think that any of the 550 beds that are needed by country people will be taken away from the city. This measure will mean that more people will go to the city for health care. Where will the people from Clayton and Milang down on the lakes go? There will be nothing at Strathalbyn: it will be a bandaid centre. People will go to Mount Barker, and that will be overcrowded, and straight through to Adelaide.

In the Mallee there is the Australian Zircon mine at Mindarie and there is the mine at Strathalbyn. They are heavy industries, and there will be no hospitals in sight. There will be a bandaid hospital at Strathalbyn, and Karoonda basically will be shut down to become an aged-care centre. How will we attract doctors to the bush? We have had plenty of trouble in the Mallee in recent years in attracting people to Pinnaroo, Lameroo and Karoonda, where we have excellent services. With the downgrading of services, will we see it in the future?