

HEALTH POLICY — COMMONWEALTH—STATE RELATIONS

466. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Health:

My question —

Mr P.B. Watson: Read it and don't forget the preamble!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am acknowledging my number one fan over there, every time I am on my feet!

I note that today the state Labor opposition has again backed its federal counterparts in holding Western Australian patients to ransom. Could the minister please update the house on the status of commonwealth—state relations in respect of health?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

That was an excellent question and I congratulate the member for it. I will first acknowledge the year 7 students from Living Waters Lutheran College, and students from Methodist Ladies' College, who are in the gallery. I thank the member for the question.

I was amazed when listening to the radio this morning to hear my erstwhile opponent putting on a fake sad and sorry voice.

Mr E.S. Ripper: He's also your present opponent.

Dr K.D. HAMES: He was talking about the proposal by the federal government to break the GST agreement in order to get 30 per cent health funding that it can then call its own and give back to Western Australia, so it looks as though it is funding 60 per cent. I cannot put on such a fake voice, but according to my notes he stated —

Well what we're hoping to see is a renewed commitment to the negotiation process with the Gillard Government.

We want to see strong outcomes for health in Western Australia; in particular, we want to see strong outcomes for regional health in Western Australia.

What a joke. Gary Gray was also on the radio, saying exactly the same thing. Members opposite just do not get it. They do not get that they were absolutely caned in Western Australia and they do not understand why. They were caned because they come out with a fake view that we should suddenly have an agreement. We have been working with the commonwealth government to try to get an agreement on health. We have been working exceptionally hard. We participated in all the negotiations on health outcomes and we agreed to all the outcomes as put forward in the national health reform package. We and many of the Labor states—before they were monstered by Mr Rudd—did not want to agree to the breaking of the GST agreement. I can tell members that that had strong support in Western Australia and it is one of the reasons that the Labor Party has only three federal seats left in this state.

When we first said that we would not sign this deal on the breaking of the GST, we said that we would agree to all the other things, and the federal minister came out and said, "We'll just give it to the hospitals," and I said, "Good! We own the hospitals; they are our hospitals. Give us the money!" Then she said, "Maybe we won't give it to the hospitals after all. Maybe we'll give it to the NGO organisations or other areas out there that need the money, or find another way to get it to Western Australia". I wrote to the federal health minister and put forward some options. Although we support the national health reform package, the areas to which the money was going are not our highest priorities. We believe that the money could be better spent on other areas. Members should remember that it is a \$350 million package over four years, with \$100 million in the first year, which would be spent on health in the first five or six days. Do not get me wrong, we would like to have the money. I told the minister where we need it most. We need \$30 million for elective surgery and emergency areas; \$7.2 million for emergency care models; \$55 million for an enhanced care delivery to the regional areas of the north west so that we can deliver better health services in the bush; \$63 million for aged-care programs, because some people eligible for aged care are stuck in hospital and have nowhere to go; and \$20 million for child health services and a proposal for an increased use of telehealth services in the bush.

In the lead-up to the calling of the last election, I asked the federal health minister whether we could sort this out and come to an agreement. I received a letter in response. I will not read it out because I do not have her okay to do so. Basically, it states that what I asked for was just not on and that if the government wanted the funding promised for Western Australia for the reforms that the federal government thought were the most important for Western Australia, including rural and regional health, we had to sign the deal, which meant that we would have to break the GST agreement. We will not do that no matter what. We do not think it is in the best interests of the taxpayers or the people of Western Australia. We are happy with health reforms. We have agreed to the federal government's health reforms, but there is no way that we will break the GST agreement and give the

commonwealth unfettered access to our GST. We will stick to our guns. That is one of the reasons we won the state election and it is one of the reasons that federal Labor has only three Western Australian seats.