



COUNTRY HEALTH CARE PLAN

Mr GRIFFITHS (Goyder) (15:35): As opposed to the member for West Torrens and his rather strange ravings about Liberal Party preselections, I intend to talk about quite a serious matter and that is country health. Other members in the chamber have spoken about it today, but I want to give the house some account of the degree of emotion that has been running in the electorate of Goyder.

Since the release on 5 June of the Country Health Care Plan, via a website, people have inundated my office; it has been continual. I reacted quickly and recognised the fact that there needed to be a forum for people to be able to express their concerns, to ask questions and to be informed about it, so I have held three public meetings in my electorate. The first one was at Maitland, and it was fantastic to see 700 people there. These are not fictional numbers that people make up; 700 people came along. The upstairs part of the hall was full, every seat was taken downstairs, and 100 people sat in the supper room listening to the debate through the loud speakers—but there were 700 people all concerned about the future of the Yorketown Hospital. They wanted to know answers and they asked questions. It was not just a rant and a rave, it was not incited by political parties at all.

I chaired the meeting, I will be honest with members on that, only because I had taken the lead and wanted to ensure that people had the opportunity to find out. We had two representatives from Country Health SA present, Mr Nino DiSisto and Mr Gary Stewart. Everybody was given a chance to speak. Dr George Coker also spoke. George has practised in Yorketown for about 35 years. The mayor of Yorke Peninsula council was given a chance to speak. I spoke, and Vickie Chapman, the shadow minister for health, also spoke briefly, but our contribution to the meeting only went for about 45 minutes. Beyond that it was people who stood up and asked questions and tried to get answers.

I am sure that, when Mr DiSisto went home, he had a nightmare about the fact that, when he was asked where Yorke Peninsula people should go when they need the next level of care beyond what is provided in a country community hospital—and our closest one is at Wallaroo—he said, 'Whyalla.' You can imagine when people on Yorke Peninsula are told that they have to go to Whyalla—

Ms Breuer: As if.

Mr GRIFFITHS: You weren't there, member for Giles. You might say that we are lying on this side, but I am telling you what 700 people heard him say. He would have regretted that fact because he knew instantly it was a mistake. If Yorke Peninsula people travel anywhere for a greater degree of health care, they go to Adelaide.

Ms Breuer: Of course they do.

Mr GRIFFITHS: Yes, why then did the Country Health SA representative say Whyalla? They need to get their facts right. People asked how long they would be admitted to the Yorketown Hospital if they were ill or seriously ill. We were told at that very first meeting that observation beds were only 24 hours maximum and that, beyond that, patients had to be transferred to a country community hospital; in our case, Wallaroo. Since that time the minister has reflected upon that, recognised the error in that it does not give people the level of service that they want and the time has been extended, but we still do not know for how long people can be admitted to their own local hospital.

I held a meeting in Balaklava that 500 people attended. That was three weeks ago tonight. Again that hall was full. I have enforced at each of my meetings that the people from Country Health are just delivering the message. They are not the ones who develop the policy, that is the responsibility of the minister and

the cabinet. The people from Country Health are there to try to give answers, but there are so many areas in which questions are being asked that they have not been able to provide answers.

Mr Pederick interjecting:

Mr GRIFFITHS: The minister was invited to the next meeting at Maitland, which was held a couple of weeks ago, and 400 people turned up on that occasion. Sadly, people have been conned a little bit. They have read all these advertisements in the paper and they have heard the minister on the radio, repeatedly trying to get himself out of trouble, and fewer people attended, but still we had 400 people there who were really passionate about the hospital.

The local press told me that, in the case of one journalist who has been reporting in the area for 25 years, she has never known people to be so incensed about one thing and so concerned about the future of one issue. ABC Radio came to Yorketown two weeks ago. Matthew and David spent the entire morning there on Friday, they conducted interviews with the local people, they pre-recorded interviews on the way down and they held a forum from 11 o'clock to which people rang in, wanting information.

At the Maitland public meeting, one comment was made by a chap who had been a member of the HAC board (previously the health board) for 27 years, and in his time the community raised \$2.2 million towards upgrades that have taken place at that hospital. They are really concerned about it and they want to be assured. My community does not rant and rave: my community wants to be informed. What they have been told does not give them enough confidence that there is a commitment there in the long term from Country Health to ensure that country hospitals stay open.

The retention of hospitals is absolutely critical to the future viability and economic wellbeing of the communities I serve. They all want to make sure at Yorktown, Balaklava and Maitland that their hospitals have a future. Indeed, all 43 GP Plus emergency hospitals across regional South Australia, which have been identified by the minister, want a stronger future. At the moment, they are not getting that; they are not getting the commitment they need.

Time expired.