



## **Labor's failure in health!**

**by Senator Mathias Cormann on 25 June 2009**

[Senator CORMANN](#) (Western Australia) (3:08 PM) —I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Special Minister of State and Cabinet Secretary (Senator Ludwig) to questions without notice asked today.

This government have been an absolute failure when it comes to health. They have not fixed public hospitals despite an unequivocal pre-election commitment by the Prime Minister to do so by the middle of 2009. They are putting additional pressure on public hospitals through their misguided ideological attack on Australians doing the right thing by the health system by taking additional responsibility for their own healthcare needs. It is an ideological attack on people with private health insurance. They are now running away, at a million kilometres an hour, from the equally emphatic pre-election commitment that if sufficient progress had not been made by the middle of 2009, the Rudd government would take to the Australian people the proposition that the Commonwealth would take over the running of Australia's 750 public hospitals.

We have a health minister who is more occupied with doing the bidding of the Treasurer, being the propaganda machine for the Treasurer, than with focusing on implementing and pursuing sound public policy on health. If we had a minister that was more focussed on fixing public hospitals rather than being out there doing the Treasurer's bidding, perhaps our public hospitals would be a little bit better off. Today I asked a series of questions of Senator Ludwig. I asked, 'Are Australia's public hospitals fixed?' He talked us through a whole series of bureaucratic processes that go on within government. Any government can provide a running list of all the great things they do, but it is outcomes that we are interested in. The Prime Minister did not promise that he would go through a whole series of bureaucratic processes. He promised that Australia's public hospitals would be fixed. There is evidence in state after state after territory that they are not fixed. We had another half-a-dozen questions to ask, giving examples from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia that Australia's public hospitals are not fixed.

Even the Prime Minister realises that he will not be able to achieve his emphatic pre-election commitment. Quietly, quietly, hoping that nobody would notice, he made a little change to his website where he talks about the government's commitment to the health system. This time last year the Prime Minister's website listed its commitment on health under a headline 'Fixing our hospitals'. Do you know what it says now? It says, 'Improving our hospitals'. Last year he was going to fix our hospitals; this year he will be improving our hospitals. I bet he did not think anybody would notice. This was done quietly, sneakily, so that nobody would notice. There is all this back-peddling: 'We do not want people to think that we are not doing what we are saying we are doing, so we are just going to change what it is that we allegedly promised.' So 'fixing' our hospitals has become 'improving' our hospitals.

There are a few other 'minor' linguistic changes that I am sure the Senate would be interested to know about. This is what the Prime Minister said last year:

... if significant progress towards the implementation of the reforms—

the national health care reform, in partnership with state and territory governments—

has not been achieved by mid-2009, the Government will seek a mandate from the Australian people at the following federal election for the Commonwealth to take financial control of Australia's 750 public hospitals.

So last year he referred to 'significant progress towards implementation'. Now he says, 'We will develop a long-term reform plan.' So it is no longer 'significant progress towards implementation'; it is, 'By the middle of 2009 we will finalise a plan.' So the government have gone from, 'We promise outcomes; we promise to fix hospitals,' to bureaucratic process language.

This is an absolute disgrace. This government have been a failure in health. They are so blinded by their ideological hatred for private health that that is what has been guiding their first 18 months in office. They have not focused on the main game. They have not focused on what is required—to actually ensure that we have a health system that works. Everything that we have had from this government is spin and rhetoric, no substance whatsoever. It is time that somebody held this government to account for their absolute failure in health.