



CONSULTATIONS A MOCKERY (also see below radio precis 12/11/08)
11 November 2008

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold labeled the government's newly released Country Health Care Strategy as a mockery of country people.

The government announced that the Draft Strategy for Planning Country Health Services in SA has been released for a four week period of public consultations. The Minister also announced that public consultations will be held in a few areas throughout the state.

"Obviously the Minister wants to keep the public in the dark as much as possible while appearing to be offering the olive branch" Mrs Penfold said.

She questioned the usefulness of holding public meetings during the daytime when most people will be at work and more particularly during harvest.

"Three of the four two-hour meetings proposed for Eyre Peninsula are in the daytime when people are working and farmers are harvesting what little crop they have. So this is not a plan to get a lot of people along to have input" she said.

"Rural people will hardly have the time to read and digest the 'strategy' in the timeframe allowed, let alone have time to discuss the outcomes with peers in the community and attend these inconvenient and contrived meetings."

Public meetings previously held in the evenings commanded huge turnouts. However there are only 4 meetings planned for Eyre Peninsula, Cleve, Cummins, Wudinna and Streaky Bay while Tumby Bay, Kimba, Elliston, Ceduna and Port Lincoln are not even afforded the opportunity to attend a meeting in their home town.

"Once again isolation, distance and sparse populations mean the government's token effort is a mockery of justice," Mrs Penfold said.

She said the previously announced "plan" which indicated action, has now become a "strategy" which indicates ideas and talk fests. The document is very light on detail and until there is some disclosure, Mrs. Penfold believes the plan is useless for regional hospitals to have any sense of security for the future. ENDS

Liz Penfold, Member for Flinders (639ABC 8.47-8.54) Country Health Draft Plan

(Weir: ... Liz Penfold has had a bit of a look at the new Country Health Draft Plan and she says that the consultation process and the timeline involved makes a mockery of country people ... good morning ... are you saying the Minister and the Dept of Health wants to keep people in the dark in the country?)

yes I think so, I think it's a bit of a joke what they're trying to do, what happened to the consultation with each and everyone of the hospitals in their communities, that seems to have gone out the door, its population based funding, I think they're dead keen to get The Marj and with the economic slow down there just won't be the money, so the more they keep us down and keep us to the minimum, the more money they have to spend in the city and that's how this

comes across to me, I don't think that we're being given a fair crack of the whip, it's going to be harvest time, three of these consultation meetings are going to be in the middle of the day, everyone that can will be out harvesting or they work, because they've got to have [unclear] these days, so the people that will get there will be mostly the retired people, well they're not the ones that are going to have to take the responsibility of our hospitals on board for the future

(Weir: The Health Minister John Hill would say that this new draft is really a strategy so that the real consultation can now take place, so is it simply the matter of the timeline involved?)

well there's just too few consultations, there's a month to do the consultation, there's only four out of the ten hospitals on Eyre Peninsula that are going to have meetings in their towns, of those meetings, three of them are going to be in the middle of the day and in the middle of harvest, so you can't help but think that this is just a joke, what we really needed and I think people were happy with, was each town with a hospital and each community was going to be consulted about what they needed for their community, now they're not going to get it, it's not happening, so my confidence that this is a genuine attempt to try and get things right in country regions and it won't be just my country region, it's right across regional SA, it's just not going - that's not really what they want (

Weir: You said that the previous draft of what was a plan in using the word plan the government indicated that there was going to be action and a lot of people were very concerned about potential actions and the impacts on them, on their community, and you're saying that this one is a strategy so it's the opportunity simply for more talk?)

yes I think that's what it is, it's the usual thing, consult us to death until we all just feel we can't say anymore, but don't take any notice, so if things are always changing as I said, we were supposed to be getting this individual consultation with each hospital, each community, now it's a strategy and it's over four weeks and it just indicates that someone's going to come, have a talk at a very inconvenient time to the people and then go away again, say they've consulted and they've got a strategy in mind, well I think the strategy is being evident because the plan put it in place, that's what they really want and this is to keep us all quiet while they get on with it

(Weir: You've also suggested that the consultation is only happening in certain selected towns across the Eyre Peninsula, is this typical of or do you think that this is typical of the government's hap hazard approach?)

well Cleve, Cummins, Wudinna and Streaky Bay are going to have consultations but Tumby Bay, Kimba, Elliston, Ceduna, Port Lincoln, Cowell are not going to be afforded the opportunity of consultations, now those communities, they can't go across to the towns, especially in the middle of the day, where the government have decreed there will be a consultation, again, these people want to keep their hospitals, I've already had phone calls from concerned people, one particular doctor was absolutely beside himself, that his little hospital which is vital to the community, is his future, is not going to have the input to say what they want for their hospital, every hospital is different, every hospital has different needs, they have slightly different facilities, they know what they need in their particular hospital, and so that individual consultation to tailor the needs for that hospital to the needs of their community is what they want, that's what they were assured they were going to be given and this is not what they're getting

(Weir: Rob Kerin who is the retiring Member for Frome is saying it was the frustration of being in Opposition for the last six or seven years that finally was the last straw for him... how are you feeling in terms of where you sit with the government right now?)

I feel absolutely disgusted with this government, it's population based funding, they're putting all their efforts into gimmicks and icons in the city, and very expensive ones, super schools, super hospital, a super hospital but their real economic driver for this state is the country regions, this is where the real jobs and economy is going to drive this state, but we're not getting any of the infrastructure and the things we need, now that's shown I think by the plan that they've put in place for their infrastructure, their five projects for the \$20b with Federal funding, Building Australia Fund are all city based projects and none of them are income earning assets, they're all depreciating liabilities that are going to be sitting in the city, now that to me is just insane thinking, the economics of it doesn't make sense to me, we need the basic infrastructure in the city like Tom Playford, in the country rather, like Tom Playford put, out in the region to get these small, particularly the mining, 80% of the mining, exploration is in my electorate or the Gawler Craton anyway and yet not a cent is being requested out of this Federal Building Fund to put in the infrastructure we need and yet if we don't get a big port somewhere in the Eyre Peninsula, and certainly not up at Port Bonython because that is a wrong place for desal, wrong place for a port, it needs to be on the west coast, it needs to be connected to the railway and we're not getting it

(Weir: ... appreciate you being on the program ...) thank you.

Call for Health Minister to resign 1 August 2008

"Yesterday morning's back flip by the Minister for Health, John Hill on his South Australian Country Health Care Plan

is proof that he has mismanaged the health portfolio and should resign”, said Mrs Penfold, Member for Flinders.

“He has caused massive unnecessary anguish and distress in all our small regional communities and it will take years for many people to recover and gain enough confidence to live and invest in them.”

Eight weeks ago on the 5th June Mr Hill released his Country Health Care plan without any prior community consultation.

“I don’t think he had any idea of how many people he would frighten and also insult by implementing this plan” said Mrs Penfold.

“This issue has attracted the biggest response I have ever seen in my 14 years of being the Member for Flinders. It really hit home for the regional constituents and they have fought and will continue to fight for the heart and soul of their communities- their hospitals” said Mrs Penfold.

“Minister Hill did not undertake a Regional Impact Statement which in itself shows a blatant disregard to regional people and the lack of thought and planning put into this Country Health Care Plan”

“Clearly he is incapable of handling the health portfolio and I don’t believe that country people will ever trust him again.” Mrs Penfold said.

Mrs Penfold also commented on the Labor Government’s waste of thousands of dollars advertising the now ‘failed’ Country Health Care Plan. “That wasted money could have been spent where it is most needed- on our country hospitals”

“Well done to all those who wrote, rang and emailed the Minister and media, attended rallies and meetings. It is this pressure that has made the Minister re evaluate his plan. This is a win in itself for our regional communities.” Such an outcry may well be needed again as the cuts to our small schools impact on their viability and they are forced to close. “Big is not better for hospitals or schools Mr Rann”, Mrs Penfold stated

Ends:

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Labor condemns country hospitals 1 July 2008

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said that the pressure on Health Minister John Hill over the downgrading of country hospitals is having an affect but many hospitals are still condemned to a slow death by Labor.

“Under public pressure to provide more certainty on country hospitals, Mr Hill today during questions on the budget indicated that he has chosen one hospital from each of Eyre Peninsula’s existing hospital clusters for survival over the next ten years,” she said.

Of the Cleve/Kimba/Cowell cluster, Cleve has been chosen to have “no material change” while Cowell and Kimba are “not sustainable”.

Of the Streaky Bay/Wudinna/Elliston cluster, Streaky Bay “may change”, Elliston is “not sustainable”, and Wudinna can expect “no material change”.

The Cummins/Tumby Bay cluster has Tumby Bay with “no material change expected” and Cummins as a “**may** change” hospital.

"It is an interesting reprieve to note that the minister has changed to "may" as opposed to "will" from the actual statement in the health care plan that states 'Birthing and surgical services currently provided in Cummins **will** be transferred to the Port Lincoln General Hospital over time' " Mrs Penfold. .

Mrs Penfold said these dire predictions by the Minister will be a self-fulfilling prophecy with funding priorities and the expectations of bureaucrats and communities influenced significantly by the Minister's forecasts.

"The Minister says he is now consulting the people and I urge everyone to contact him about the detrimental effect of his Country Health Plan on Eyre Peninsula's small communities and ask him to maintain all our hospitals," she said.

"However he's already put the relevant Act in place and he has put the Budget in place yet no Regional Impact Statement has even been developed.

"The Minister stated in answer to the Shadow Health Minister Vicki Chapman that he believed the results of any RIS would be largely positive, which indicates his current thinking!"

Mrs Penfold said replies given to questions arising from the public protest meeting at Cummins were typical bureaucratic put-offs.

"In response to the request for a definition for an acute bed, the reply is that the current practice of acute care in Cummins will continue.

"What does the Minister mean by 'acute care'? And how can it happen without a doctor and the facilities that are there now?" she asked.

Mrs Penfold said that modelling done by the Rural Doctors Association of SA (RDASA) has shown that, under the government's new plan, patients in 10 of the affected communities would face between 200 and 400 kilometre return trips to access acute inpatient care resulting in almost 3 million additional kilometres of travel and about \$3.3 million in additional costs per year.

RDASA's modelling is based on the 43 rural South Australian hospitals which could lose acute medical inpatient services under the plan, and is based on figures supplied in the SA Country Health Care Plan i.e. the government's own figures.

RDASA vice president Dr Rischbieth said, "It is nonsensical to suggest that rural South Australians will be better off under the Plan.

"The Plan has been the definition of chaos from day one and our calculations show just how much more money it will cost South Australian taxpayers and rural patients."

Eight Hospitals Downgraded on Eyre Peninsula 6th June 2008

On Eyre Peninsula only Port Lincoln and Whyalla are to remain as Country General Hospitals providing all services, with Ceduna the only Country Community Hospital left. The other eight hospitals are now to be called GP-Plus Emergency Hospitals. The Minister's only reassurance was that "Under this plan, no county hospital will be forcibly closed."

Mrs Penfold said "I expected that the Government would be cutting services at some of our smaller hospitals but not all eight. There is absolutely no guarantee that adequate funding will be provided to keep these hospitals running at a level acceptable to our communities. While the Minister says that they won't be forcibly closed the implication is that they will probably be starved to a slow and painful death by lack of State funding."

Cleve, Cowell, Cummins, Elliston, Streaky Bay, Tumby Bay, Wudinna and Kimba hospitals are all to be downgraded to GP-Plus Emergency Hospitals providing minor medical procedures, health education, chronic disease self

management, domiciliary care, specialist clinics, nursing services and antenatal and postnatal care.

“Most of the Services from these smaller hospitals will be relocated at Port Lincoln, Ceduna and Whyalla which means more travel for patients, more expense and more pressure on already over worked staff in those hospitals. Patients will have to travel hours by car to access basic services or travel even further to Adelaide’s bigger hospitals where disease control, overcrowding and waiting lists are already issues.” She said.

“These downgrades are likely to result in job cuts in the smaller hospitals, putting more pressure on paid staff and more pressure on our volunteer ambulance officers who give up their own time to service our communities at their own expense with no payment and little recognition from the State Government.”

In February Mrs Penfold asked the Health Minister John Hill what the expected additional cost of volunteer ambulance services would be, to enable them to cope with the expected increased load that would be caused by the new Country Health Care Plan. Two months later, Mr Hills full response was, “I am advised that no additional costs are expected.”

Mrs Penfold said “Country people should be angry. It is a well known fact that there are already higher mortality rates in rural areas and if anything the Government should be allocating more funds and expanding our health services not downgrading and centralising them. At the very least more paid officers to man ‘on call’ Ambulances must be available to transfer people as quickly as possible to designated hospitals.”

“If suitable treatment is not received within what is called ‘the golden hour’ survival rates for patients fall dramatically. With help now even further away it is not right to call on farmers, housewives and business people and their employees to scramble to man an ambulance day and night often for many hours, as well as undergoing the considerable training without proper reimbursement.”

Mortality Rates for rural men are 15% higher than urban males and the mortality rate is 9% higher for rural women.

Streaky Bay and Wudinna would be expected to attend the Ceduna Community Hospital however if a Country General Hospital needed to be accessed patients would have to be taken from Ceduna to Port Lincoln which is 408 kilometres or to Whyalla which is 457 kilometres away. If access to Adelaide was required it is 796 km’s away.

Elliston, Cummins and Tumby Bay would be expected to attend Port Lincoln Country General Hospital and Cowell, Kimba and Cleve would be expected to attend Whyalla Country General Hospital.

ENDS

Refer to Liz’s Speeches Page for questions relating to this topic.