



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Motion

24 September 2020

HOSPITAL PARKING

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:11:46):

I move:

That this House:

- (1) Appreciates all the indispensable frontline workers in New South Wales hospitals.**
- (2) Recognises workers' morale has been improved by the implementation of free parking for staff at hospitals.**
- (3) Urges the Minister for Health and Medical Research to continue the successful free parking scheme for all New South Wales hospitals.**

It is the little things that make us happy. When the COVID pandemic first hit New South Wales, our valiant healthcare staff were at the coalface. They make us happy. It was not just the doctors and nurses treating patients and testing for COVID that kept the hospital open; it was also the cleaners, caterers, administration staff, parking attendants, security staff, engineers and tradies. I particularly thank all staff at the John Hunter Hospital and the Calvary Mater Hospital in my electorate. I put on record the incredibly hard work that the Minister for Health and Medical Research has done on a daily basis in dealing with the pandemic. The advice and assistance that he has provided me and my staff is truly appreciated.

One kind gesture from the Government that has meant a lot to all of our healthcare workers is the elimination of parking fees at hospitals. Parking costs are significant for local hospital workers, with kitchen staff and cleaners on lower wages often feeling the

pinch. Access to free parking has lifted some of that pressure and it is an important morale boost for workers. Frontline staff must be able to access their place of work as easily as possible, and these measures ensure that this can happen. It is a difficult and unprecedented time, and we need to do everything possible to ease the pressure on the family budgets. Now is not the time to make money from the people who are dealing with this health crisis. The free parking initiative was welcomed and its news was eagerly shared by my many Facebook followers, and by many of my followers on other social media channels. Rebecca, a nurse at the John Hunter Hospital, said:

Thank you. It is the only reason I got parking this year. It saves me sometimes long walks in the rain and at night when I am already tired enough.

Vicky, who also works at the John Hunter Hospital, said:

The free parking will make a huge impact on the bottom line of my family. My husband has lost his job, as has my daughter who still lives with us. I would have had to have given up the parking to save some money, which would have meant walking long distances to the hospital.

The union representing many workers in the New South Wales hospital system, the Health Services Union [HSU], worked closely with the Government to bring this important initiative to fruition. Secretary of the NSW branch of the HSU Gerard Hayes said:

These changes have gone a long way to ensure that our health workers are well supported during the COVID pandemic. This is a stressful time for our hospital staff, who are doing vital work to keep the community safe. Overworked staff can ill afford the additional financial stresses at this time of serious health concerns.

Those are just some of the hundreds of comments and messages that were sent to me. For many families, the money saved is spent at local small businesses, who as we all know have struggled due to COVID. Since the virus hit in February, more than 40,000 Hunter citizens have lost their jobs, with many thousands more surviving on JobKeeper or JobSeeker payments. We know that the situation is the same across New South Wales. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey estimates that 21,500 people in the Newcastle local government area were unemployed in June. This is the highest figure since the bureau began regional reporting in 1998 and is 1,900 more than the previous record, set in May. Those numbers will climb further as JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments subside, people return to the labour market and zombie businesses fail.

We know that many people in our community are faced with extreme financial stress at this difficult time, and that includes many families of healthcare workers. There is still a long way to go to defeat the COVID virus. We need to do all we can to ease the burden on them, as they have performed above and beyond all of our needs. I nicely, kindly and graciously ask the Minister for Health and Medical Research to continue this successful free parking scheme for all New South Wales hospitals. It is a little thankyou for the hard work that our hospital staff put in, and we know that they appreciate it. We want to show all hospital staff—particularly those at the John Hunter

Hospital and the Calvary Mater Hospital—that they are appreciated by members of the House.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) (12:17:52):

I note that the Minister for Health and Medical Research is present, and I am sure that he agrees that we need free parking at the new Tweed Valley Hospital. The Government committed to it and I am not going to back away from it. I am putting the Minister on notice right now!

Mr Brad Hazzard: Thank you, Geoff. I appreciate that.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: Now go and do some work! I compliment the member for Wallsend. She has always exhibited a great deal of kindness, compassion and understanding, and her work on this issue is another example of that. I congratulate her. I too support our frontline workers. From Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant to our contact tracers, public health workers and doctors and nurses—everyone has been outstanding. I was recently invited by the Health Services Union [HSU] to its thankyou for food service staff. I attended, and I must admit that I had a very good morning tea. Peter Hall, the union delegate out that way, does an outstanding job representing the rights of union members. Well done, Peter. Goodness me, I have spent two days praising those on the other side!

A diverse and multiskilled team of professionals are providing essential healthcare services to the people of New South Wales during the pandemic. In addition to their usual duties, healthcare professionals are providing treatment and support for people who are suffering from COVID-19 as well as delivering the help needed by those undergoing rehabilitation and recovery. When the pandemic was declared, NSW Health workers acted immediately to ensure that health services were ready and able to respond. We see this time and again. Once again, we owe them a great deal of credit. The collective effort is continuing to ensure that the State is prepared and ready to respond to any scenario. The New South Wales Government appreciates the effort of our frontline healthcare workers during this time and acknowledges the stresses they experience in responding to COVID-19.

Our healthcare professionals are among the best in the world and it is critical that our frontline workers can access their place of work as easily as possible in this unprecedented period. To support New South Wales healthcare workers during this time, the New South Wales Government has arranged accommodation and free parking. Free parking at New South Wales public hospital car parks has been available to healthcare workers since 10 April 2020. This initiative was intended to make life easier for our doctors, nurses, allied health workers and other hospital staff, including cleaners and security, who make sure our hospitals run smoothly. Following the announcement made by the New South Wales Premier and Minister for Health and Medical Research, hospitals across New South Wales implemented several measures to manage capacity and increase access to free parking for New South Wales healthcare workers.

The initiative provides support for healthcare workers and is intended to ease the burden on hospital workers during COVID-19. The uptake of this initiative by New South Wales healthcare workers at New South Wales hospitals has been strong, with staff providing positive feedback. The New South Wales Government has also been liaising with local councils to see how they can expand parking options for hospital staff during this period, such as by removing timed parking around hospitals. I thank local councils that have assisted by improving access to suitable car parking for healthcare workers around New South Wales public hospitals. The temporary free car parking for New South Wales healthcare workers at New South Wales public hospitals is continuing, as dedicated healthcare workers continue to respond to the needs of the people of New South Wales during COVID-19.

Supporting healthcare workers through this response to COVID-19 is extraordinarily important. I am sure I speak for everybody in this House—and I know your background as a nurse, Madam Deputy Speaker; well done for that—in saying that we are in awe of the way they turn up to work and look after us all. I recently had pneumonia and attended hospital. It is a daunting process when you front to emergency and say, "Yes, I'm experiencing flu-like symptoms and I have a fever," and they respond, "Stand over there in the corner, Mr Provest, till we get all ready." I cannot honour them too much. I see them time and again. The HSU food service workers and security workers are the real unsung heroes. I praise nurses and doctors but the support service staff are also essential. They all work as a team. I have been canvassing for a trial of stab-proof vests for security officers. I am pushing very hard for that. We held an inquiry and I think we should do all we possibly can. I will probably get hit by the health Minister when I walk out of the Chamber.

I was quite amazed to see in the hospital a drawer of knives and implements that had been confiscated. We are talking about knives and small swords. It is amazing. The stress those security workers experience is intense. To my way of thinking, providing security officers with a stab-proof vest is very similar to construction workers being supplied steel-cap boots and helmets by their employers. It is a tool of trade. We hear a lot in the media about personal protective equipment and its supply. Unfortunately, I have seen in our hospitals some of the results of the use of illicit drugs such as ice. I was in a hospital when a young girl was in an isolation ward with her parents crying outside because she was a different person from the one they brought up. I believe all workers in our hospitals, not only doctors and nurses, do their best. Everyone loves free parking. You have to get there early to get it at most hospitals, but I endorse the Government's actions and those of the member for Wallsend in moving the motion. I commend the motion.

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) (12:24:43):

We all applauded the New South Wales Government's action on 10 April 2020 when it was announced that healthcare workers would have free access to parking at public hospital car parks to ease the burden on our hospital workers during this health crisis. I commend the member for Wallsend for moving this motion. It is a well thought-out motion and affects every person in every electorate. The implementation of this moratorium on the payment of parking fees has made a huge difference to the bottom line for many healthcare workers, especially those working in lower-paid jobs and particularly in my electorate of Shellharbour.

The savings made by healthcare workers because of free parking will not be squirrelled away; they will be spent in local shops and supermarkets, buying the things their families need. The types of savings we are talking about here will make a difference for a household that is struggling. This initiative will not bring in a great deal of money but it might fill the tank or buy something that eases the constant pressure of working in an industry where the risk of contracting COVID-19 is not a vague threat but a constant workplace hazard. Many of our hospitals are located in densely populated areas, where street parking is often at a premium. It can be very difficult to find parking within close proximity of a hospital if you cannot afford to park in the hospital car park. The provision of free parking at hospitals for these frontline employees should be more than just a one-off; it should remain as an ongoing provision of their employment.

We learnt very quickly the value of our frontline healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The provision of free parking has made it quicker and easier for them to access their workplace, which is necessary. It saves those who simply cannot afford to pay daily parking fees the time it takes to search much further afield for limited parking on the street. We are talking not just about doctors or nurses, as the member for Tweed highlighted, but about the cleaners, caterers, administration staff, parking attendants, security, engineers, tradies—and the list goes on. Those health workers and others need the quick and affordable access that free parking provides. It is something the general public will acknowledge is a good idea on an ongoing basis.

The Government is in a position to continue to provide free parking—an initiative that should remain even when all other subsidies such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker are wound back. The initiative is extremely popular and is often shared on social media. When the pandemic passes it will leave the Australian economy in a deep recession, with many of the employment areas cited impacted seriously. Those frontline workers have worked tirelessly to provide the level of service that has gone a long way towards keeping virus transmission at such a low level. I ask that the health Minister recognise this service in perpetuity by leaving in place the Government's very successful free parking arrangement for all New South Wales hospitals. In closing, if the Government were really fair dinkum about its feelings for public sector workers it would lift the wage freeze and pay all our public healthcare workers their 2.5 per cent increase.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (12:28:18):

I too thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion. I acknowledge her words and those of the member for Tweed and the member for Shellharbour. Something like 145,000 health staff are employed across 15 local health districts. The member for Shellharbour referred to the diversity of roles. As she said, it is not just the doctors and nurses; it is also the cleaners, the assistants and the people who work behind the scenes in the executive teams. All of them have faced immense pressures and challenges over the past few months, so I put on record my thanks to them.

At the border, where I am from, we get Victorian television. A commercial that has been played over the past month or so shows parents of a nurse talking about the stress and anxiety they feel for their daughter as they see her go to work. I want to

thank not only the healthcare staff but also their families for their support. When we talk about the diversity of roles, I point out that in the middle of the term "healthcare worker" is the word "care". That is the important part of that phrase. I recognise the good work and care that is being provided by people in the healthcare sector during these challenging times. It is important that they get our support.

Support is being provided from the \$2.3 billion funding the New South Wales Government announced in March to protect jobs in the community, with Health receiving \$700 million from the fund. That money has gone towards increasing intensive care unit [ICU] capacity, preparing for the scale up of COVID-19 testing, purchasing additional ventilators and medical equipment and the establishment of extra testing clinics. The Government also delivered 89 new ambulances as well as additional lifesaving defibrillators and laryngoscopes as part of the stimulus. Last year the Minister for Health and Medical Research visited my electorate of Albury and noted the use of video laryngoscopes at Culcairn or Holbrook. Technology is always evolving and we need to ensure we evolve with it and provide the funding. Further investment has been made towards medical research and vaccine trials, the commercialisation of research products and industry partnerships.

In April the Government announced the fast-tracking of health infrastructure projects to ensure we had additional hospital and ICU capacity available. The projects included a recovery ward at Royal North Shore Hospital, the Westmead Central Acute Services Building, the Macksville Hospital development, the Mudgee Hospital redevelopment, new ICU beds at Dubbo Hospital and, of course, free parking. The New South Wales Premier and Minister for Health and Medical Research announced that New South Wales healthcare workers would have access to free parking at New South Wales public hospitals. It is important to note that the temporary free car parking is still being offered, given the vital role that healthcare workers are playing in response to COVID-19. There are dedicated funds to ensure that doctors, nurses, paramedics and other hospital and ambulance staff can stay out of home in hotels and motels. That is important when we consider the safety of family members as well. I thank the member for Wallsend for bringing this important motion to the House and I thank all members for their contributions. Most importantly, I thank our healthcare workers and their families.

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP (Newcastle) (12:32:10):

I support the very good motion brought by the member for Wallsend stating that we appreciate all the indispensable frontline workers in New South Wales hospitals, recognising workers' morale has been improved by the implementation of free parking for staff at hospitals and, most importantly, urging the Minister for Health and Medical Research to continue this successful free parking scheme for all New South Wales hospitals. When the decision on free parking was made in April, it was welcomed throughout the community. It was particularly welcomed at the John Hunter and Calvary Mater hospitals in Newcastle, which are located in the Wallsend electorate. These staff work hard. During the pandemic there is no time that they have not worked harder, given the extra-long hours, double shifts and extra days they have all worked.

At the John Hunter Hospital, in particular, parking is a huge problem and many workers have to park a long way away in neighbouring suburbs. They have long walks in the dark late at night. This change has been very positive for them. It can take up to an hour to get out of John Hunter Hospital at the entry-exit points during the peak hours. Staff who want to get out onto the road sit in their car in the staff car park and inch forward. It takes them a very long time. Parking is problematic. We look forward to the inner-city bypass and extra entry and exit points. NSW Health paid for the exit point because Transport for NSW would not pay for it. It is a massive issue in our area.

Many workers have told me that not having to pay for parking and the convenience of parking at the hospital is a plus. On 15 June I visited the John Hunter Hospital for National Cleaners Day and I noted that the free parking was a huge boost to staff morale. I met with cleaners, members of the Health Services Union, nurses, people from the Nurses and Midwives' Association, security guards, doctors and administration workers. They were all so appreciative. The pandemic is far from over and we ask the Government to continue the free parking. It is not just for the convenience and safety, as the member for Shellharbour indicated, it is also for the hip pocket.

For people who may not earn a great deal, such as cleaners and administration staff, every dollar adds up every day, every week, every month, every year. It is important for them to have extra money when JobKeeper is being decreased and unemployment is increasing to the highest it has ever been in the Hunter, with 21,500 people unemployed—the highest rate since figures were recorded in 1998. Inevitably that number will climb. Any money we can put back into the pockets of hardworking people on the front line is welcome. I commend the Government for this terrific initiative and, along with my colleagues, I ask that the Government continues to provide free parking.

Mrs WENDY TUCKERMAN (Goulburn) (12:36:11):

I thank the member for Wallsend for bringing the motion to the House. The New South Wales healthcare system is the largest in Australia and amongst the best in the world. There are more than 145,000 health staff employed across 15 local health districts, three specialty networks and 228 public hospitals, with our dedicated teams tending to more than 1.9 million admitted patients on average each year. They are pretty amazing statistics. I thank all those healthcare workers who are involved in this system. The New South Wales Government has provided an excellent response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are incredibly grateful for the ongoing efforts of our health staff. Each day thousands of staff walk through the doors of our health facilities to ensure that our community receives the best care available. When the pandemic was declared our health workers immediately went into action to ensure that health services were ready and able to respond. Extensive planning goes into a response like the one we have now and it takes a collective effort to make it effective and successful. To this day NSW Health continues to work on ensuring the State is prepared and ready to respond to any outbreak scenario.

The New South Wales Government appreciates the challenges experienced by our frontline healthcare workers during this time. It is critical that our frontline workers are

able to access their place of work as easily as possible in this unprecedented pandemic and we have taken steps to ensure that is the case. The Government is doing everything it can to reduce the stress on our healthcare staff, who have been working around the clock responding to COVID-19. It has undertaken a number of measures to support our healthcare workers during this time, including the provision of accommodation and free parking. As announced by the Premier and the Minister for Health and Medical Research, from 10 April 2020 healthcare workers have been provided access to free parking at New South Wales public hospital car parks.

This initiative was intended to make life a little easier for our doctors, nurses and other hospital staff who are working hard to keep us all safe. Included are administration staff and cleaners, everyone involved in our healthcare system. This means all rostered staff, from doctors and other frontline workers to cleaners and security staff who make sure our hospitals run smoothly, are not charged for parking at New South Wales public hospital car parks. Following the announcement, hospitals across New South Wales implemented a number of measures to ensure access was available to accommodate free parking for our workers. The free parking supports healthcare workers and is intended to ease the burden on hospital workers during COVID-19. The initiative has been widely used by healthcare workers across New South Wales hospitals. It has given healthcare workers more accessible transport options while responding to COVID-19. I am proud to be part of the New South Wales Liberals-Nationals Government, which is delivering for our frontline services in this unprecedented time.

The Government has also liaised with local councils to see how they can support hospital staff during COVID-19, whether it be by removing timed parking around hospitals or exercising discretion with parking fines. I commend local councils that have assisted by improving car parking for staff around our hospitals. The temporary free car parking for New South Wales healthcare workers at New South Wales public hospitals is continuing, given the ongoing response to COVID-19. Supporting healthcare workers through this response is important. I thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion to recognise the support provided by the Government to our healthcare sector during this pandemic.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (12:40:22):

By leave: I thank the House for permitting me to contribute to debate on this motion. I acknowledge and thank the member for Wallsend for moving this very important motion, which allows members in this Chamber to debate a topic that each of us can appreciate. For many months members have had hospital staff raise their concerns with respect to parking and access to hospitals. Indeed, in the current pandemic we all appreciate that those staff members are now provided with free parking. I note that the member for Wallsend brings some fantastic motions to this place. I congratulate her on her incredible efforts, not only for her electorate but also for the entire State.

This motion acknowledges not only the collective effort of the State Government, the Opposition and the various general managers, management and staff of all our hospitals across our State but also our unions—the Health Services Union and the

Nurses and Midwives' Association, the members of which advocated for free parking at New South Wales hospitals. In conjunction, there has been a campaign to work with councils to ensure that, where possible, free parking is provided outside hospitals and hospital staff are not fined unnecessarily as they support our communities during this very difficult period. I acknowledge that collective effort in this instance.

I note that paragraph (3) of this motion calls on the Government to ensure that we continue free parking at hospitals. I understand that there is no end date in place at this stage. It is important that all members continue to pressure the Minister to ensure that free parking continues for as long as possible. That is critical. We respect our hospital workers—not just doctors and nurses but cleaners, specialists and support staff, who ensure that we survive this very difficult and unprecedented period we face in this State and our nation. I also acknowledge the general manager at Bankstown Hospital, Peter Rophail, and all the staff and union organisers there. I acknowledge Federal shadow local government Minister Jason Clare and Federal shadow health Minister Chris Bowen, who both advocated for councils to provide additional free parking to support the State Government initiative to provide free parking in public hospital car parks.

I remind the House that my electorate is still waiting for its \$1.3 billion new hospital, which was announced pre-election. An expression of interest process has just been completed and a little map has been drawn that indicates the boundaries of Stacey Street, the Hume Highway, Canterbury Road and Henry Lawson Drive. We have the map and we have the expression of interest process; we just do not have the money or the new hospital.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans):

The member for Bankstown should talk to the member for Shellharbour to see how long it takes to get a hospital.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (12:44:48):

By leave: I put on record my appreciation of the work done by the frontline workers in our health system. In particular, I mention the health workers in the electorate of Myall Lakes and the great work done by all the staff at the Manning Base Hospital—from the nurses and doctors through to security, domestic and ancillary staff. I give a shout-out to the general manager, Jodi Nieass, and the medical director, Dr Osama Ali, who are doing a fantastic job with the hospital. The New South Wales health system is the largest in Australia and amongst the best in the world. More than 145,000 staff members are employed across 15 local health districts. The electorate of Myall Lakes is in the Hunter New England Local Health District. Its CEO, Michael DiRienzo, has just finished—or I am hoping he has finished—a clinical services plan for the \$100 million stage two redevelopment of Manning Base Hospital. That clinical services plan is also looking at a public hospital at Forster.

Not only does the State have 15 local health districts; it has three specialty networks and 228 public hospitals, with dedicated teams attending to more than 1.9 million admitted patients on average each year. The Manning Base Hospital in the great electorate of Myall Lakes has over 30,000 presentations a year. Since we came to government we have completed the \$40 million stage one redevelopment of the Manning Base Hospital, which includes new oncology, renal dialysis, medical imaging and—importantly—a new free car park, which was great to see. Since we came to government we have increased the recurrent funding for the hospital. It has gone from just over \$50 million a year to about \$100 million a year. That means we have employed more specialists, such as two oncologists, a new anaesthetist, a new emergency specialist, a new psychiatrist and a new obstetrician, amongst others, as well as more nurses.

We are not only putting in the bricks and mortar, with \$40 million delivered—I am going for a tour of the new medical imaging facility on Monday—but also providing more services. The two go together: We do not just want bricks and mortar; we want a better service. That is what we are providing. As I said, the hospital is looking after an ever-increasing number of presentations. Only about 2½ per cent of those 30,000 presentations get referred to further specialist treatment at the John Hunter Hospital in the electorate of the member for Wallsend. Any way you look at it, in health we are doing fantastic things.

I note the Government's COVID response. There has been an \$800 million funding boost for NSW Health, \$60 million for out-of-home accommodation for health workers, \$25 million for medical research, and free parking for health workers—which, of course, members are speaking about in this debate. The response has seen one of the highest testing rates in the world, additional ICU capacity—doubled, and working to double again—the establishment of acute respiratory and COVID-19 clinics and a \$388 million elective surgery blitz. The response has also removed restrictions to allow pharmacies to operate 24/7 during this time—sometimes members forget about that. I commend the member for Wallsend for her motion.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) (12:49:10):

By leave: I support the motion moved by the member for Wallsend. I am continually amazed—although not surprised any more—at how connected the member is with her community. She continually brings motions that are relevant not just to her community, but also to many of us. This morning's motion is one such. For a long time now, along with my colleagues representing the electorates of The Entrance and Gosford and the Federal member for Dobell, I have stood shoulder to shoulder with our healthcare workers on the Central Coast advocating for free parking. Gosford Hospital currently is the only hospital that charges for parking and, like the member for Tweed, Wyong hospital is getting an upgrade. Part of that upgrade is a car park but, unfortunately, because we are included in the Sydney metropolitan area, that will have a charge. I am 100 per cent with the member for Tweed in saying that we want to keep parking at Wyong free for staff.

Wyong hospital is isolated and does not have good public transport links, so staff are pretty much forced to drive and park there not just for convenience, but also for safety. For a long time we have argued that charging staff for car parking is almost like a tax on their jobs or a reduction in their salary, because their wages do not rise to compensate for the cost of parking. We welcomed the Government's decision in April to introduce the free parking period. Like other members, I focus squarely on paragraph (3) of the motion, which calls for the free parking scheme to continue. I know the pressure is on the health Minister because he wants all his money going into health services, and I think we all agree with that. New facilities and infrastructure cost money. But staff do not have a choice; they have to go to work every day.

I think the Central Coast Local Health District employs about 7,500 staff members. That is a significant number of people. It is one of the biggest employers, if not the biggest single employer, on the Central Coast. Andrew Montague and his team do their best to keep up with our growing population and with some of the more complex needs that our area has, not just in acute health care, but also in general community health care. They do a great job. They are under pressure all the time, as are all of our hospitals. As our population ages, those pressures do not go away. From the time that Labor was in government—and all governments experience this—I know that keeping up with the necessary funds is very difficult because the more our health technology improves, the more expensive it gets. The equipment costs more and more, but we are seeing the results of that in people living longer and having better health outcomes.

Parking might seem like a little thing to some people, but as I said to our health workers, when their wages are capped where they are at the moment—they will not get their 2½ per cent rise—having to pay for parking puts extra pressure on their family budgets. I congratulate the health Minister and the Government on the decision to introduce free parking but, as other members have done, I draw the House's attention to paragraph number (3) of the motion. This is something that should continue in perpetuity.

Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter) (12:53:26):

By leave: I thank the House for granting me the opportunity to make a contribution. I congratulate the member for Wallsend. It is difficult to disagree with much of what the member for Wallsend comes up with. She is a wonderful member. As I said last week, she is the wisest person sitting on the benches opposite and we should always listen to her. This is an opportunity for me to support her motion. My electorate contains a number of hospitals, including those at Gloucester, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Scone, Merriwa, Denman, Murrurundi and Quirindi. None of those have paid parking for staff, which in some respects is a very fortunate position for our staff to be in. However, there are other challenges that they face. Since this Government came to office in 2011—and certainly in my time—it has made significant contributions to upgrading the various hospitals in my electorate. We have upgraded, in two stages, the Singleton Hospital and provided more services so local residents can get the care that they need as close to home as possible.

Muswellbrook Hospital has received major upgrades in two stages, including the emergency department and the extension of other facilities within that hospital. I continue to support the community and lobby the health Minister for stage three upgrades, and I will continue to do so until we get confirmation that that will go ahead. Recently, upgrades to the Scone hospital were completed, and upgrades to the Gloucester hospital were also completed fairly recently. Those upgrades create a situation in which our local community members can receive care as close to home as possible, with upgraded technology. The clinical staff working within those hospitals have the ability to obtain live, real-time advice from specialists right around the hospital network, which is critical when people need that clinical assistance as soon as possible and they do not have the opportunity or the ability to travel to another area.

We are in the process of upgrading the Murrurundi hospital under a particular program. In fact, it will almost look like a new hospital; for all intents and purposes, it will be a new hospital. That is currently under construction. The people of Murrurundi are very excited about that upgrade nearing completion—as are the staff, who are committed to our community. From memory, that upgrade will be completed about midway through 2021, so we are not too far off. Over the years we have seen major upgrades to the Merriwa and Denman hospitals as well, under the Government's multipurpose service model. I congratulate the Government and the member for Wallsend. More importantly, I congratulate and thank all of our medical staff in the Upper Hunter.

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (12:57:40):

By leave: I record my support for this motion, by which the House appreciates all the indispensable frontline workers in New South Wales hospitals, recognises workers' morale has been improved by the implementation of free parking for staff at hospitals and urges the Minister for health to continue the successful free parking scheme for all New South Wales hospitals. I thank the member for Wallsend. The motions she brings before this House are always thoughtful. They reflect her professionalism and dedication to her task and her care for her area, as well as her care for the people of New South Wales. In my own region, the Central Coast Local Health District is the single biggest employer in the region. I acknowledge its work and particularly the work staff are doing in the current pandemic situation, with the pressures it has imposed upon them and their families. The temporary free parking arrangements have been widely welcomed by the workforce. I acknowledge my eight colleagues on the Central Coast. We have been campaigning very hard because until recently, parking at public hospitals on the Central Coast was free. Recent redevelopments have seen the introduction of paid parking for staff, patients and visitors.

The community showed a tremendous amount of support and backed our campaign against paid parking in public hospitals. We have to recognise that a contribution is appropriate; however, for many people that contribution can be regressive. People do not choose when they are going to go a hospital. Workers in hospitals, given their shift work, often cannot choose alternate means of transport to get to work. If the cost of parking at a public hospital is too great, it can be regressive for somebody like my father, who has retired from the workforce but was formerly a cleaner at the Mater Hospital in Newcastle. Parking fees have a greater impact on the income of cleaners

at a hospital than they do on a surgeon employed at the same place. That needs to be borne in mind when considering the setting of fees and arrangements for parking at public hospitals.

I acknowledge the work of the HSU in representing its members and the wider community in terms of appropriate arrangements for parking at public hospitals. I mention officials Brad Ernst on the Central Coast and Adam Hall, who regularly visit our area. We love our hospitals on the Central Coast. We fought hard to stop those public hospitals being privatised by the current Government. I thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion. I commend the motion to the House.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) (13:01:14):

By leave: I congratulate the member for Wallsend for bringing this motion to the attention of the House and for providing members an opportunity to speak about the work performed by our healthcare professionals and what the Government has done to support our healthcare professionals during COVID-19 this year. We can all agree that 2020 has turned out to be a year that we did not expect at the commencement of a new decade. We had bushfires continuing into the new decade, flooding, a global pandemic and now a recession, the worst almost in living memory, that has hit not only New South Wales and Australia but globally. There are significant challenges that our community is facing but this Government is well skilled and committed to face them head on.

I commend the Liberal-Nationals Government which, in responding to the very quickly moving situation of the global pandemic, has acted quickly, efficiently and creatively to support our healthcare professionals. In other sectors of our community, the Government has acted to soften the impact of isolation and the forced closures of businesses in an attempt to reduce the community transmission of COVID-19. I want to thank everyone who has done something to protect our community. They could be people working in a paid profession, working at home or educating their children through online learning. Whatever they have done to protect this community from the global pandemic, I thank them.

On 17 March 2020 the New South Wales Government announced \$2.3 billion funding to protect jobs and the community, of which Health received \$700 million. A lot of that Health funding boosted the capacity, skills and resources of our healthcare system in order to prepare for what was really an unknown at the time. The money went towards an increase in intensive care unit capacity, the purchase of additional ventilators and medical equipment and the establishment of extra testing clinics. I commend Nepean Hospital for establishing pop-up COVID-19 testing clinics throughout the community. It also advertised the clinics very well, with signs on all the major roads indicating where the community could access the pop-up clinics for testing rather than burdening the hospital.

The Government also responded to support for our hospital staff by providing free car parking and support for accommodation as the uncertainty over the safety of our healthcare professionals was in question. Hospital staff who were concerned they

would bring the virus into their home were given the opportunity to stay in hotels or other accommodation to keep their families safe. The Government responded in a number of ways. I congratulate the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government on its response in this unprecedented and fast-moving global pandemic. I most certainly express the appreciation of the House for our valued allied healthcare professionals who have acted valiantly in their dedication to keeping our community safe. They really are the heroes of the story. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (13:05:26):

By leave: The New South Wales healthcare system is the largest in Australia, with more than 145,000 health staff employed across 15 local health districts, three specialty networks and 228 public hospitals. Each year our dedicated teams tend to more than 1.9 million admitted patients. I will start by expressing my personal thanks to our healthcare heroes for their ongoing efforts in leading the State's response to COVID-19. It might be a bit strange for a Liberal member of Parliament to do so but I acknowledge the leadership of the Health Services Union [HSU] and its members and delegates, some of whom I have met at St George Hospital on two or three occasions.

Every day of the year staff arrive at more than 200 healthcare facilities to provide support, care and often life-saving intervention for our loved ones. NSW Health responded quickly to COVID-19 following the declaration of a pandemic with a rapid response, from the Chief Health Officer, Dr Kerry Chant, to the contact tracers—who have done an outstanding job in New South Wales—and public health units through to our doctors, nurses and other frontline healthcare staff. Everyone has been outstanding. A diverse and multi-skilled team of professionals is providing essential healthcare services for the people of New South Wales during the pandemic. The New South Wales Government appreciates the effort of our frontline healthcare workers during this time and acknowledges the stresses experienced in responding to COVID-19. Our healthcare professionals are among the best in the world and it is critical that our frontline workers can access their place of work as easily as possible in this unprecedented period.

To support New South Wales healthcare workers during this time, the Government has arranged accommodation and free parking. Free parking at New South Wales public hospital car parks has been available to healthcare workers since 10 April 2020. This initiative was intended to make life easier for our doctors, nurses, allied health workers and other hospital staff, including cleaners and security, who make sure our hospitals run smoothly. The Government has undertaken a number of measures to support New South Wales healthcare workers during this time, including measures that maintain access to the workplace, such as the provision of accommodation and free parking. I am proud of the way that both the Government and the community have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I note in particular the extensive additional investment in Health to get us through this challenging time. On 17 March 2020 the Government announced \$2.3 billion to protect jobs and the community. Health received \$700 million from this fund. This money was dedicated to increasing the capacity of intensive care units, preparing for the scale up

of COVID-19 testing, purchasing additional ventilators and medical equipment and the establishment of extra testing clinics. The New South Wales Government has been liaising with local councils—certainly that is the case with the Georges River Council—to ascertain how parking options can be expanded for hospital staff during this period. For example, it may be possible to introduce timed parking around hospitals. I thank the general manager of Georges River Council, Gail Connolly, and the council's outstanding mayor, Kevin Greene, who assisted by improving access to suitable car parking for healthcare workers around New South Wales public hospitals. I acknowledge the member for Wallsend who moved the motion and commend her for bringing this important subject to the attention of the House.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (13:10:15):

In reply: I thank the 13 members who contributed to debate on the motion: the members for the electorates of Tweed, Shellharbour, Albury, Newcastle, Goulburn, Bankstown, Myall Lakes, Wyong, Upper Hunter, The Entrance, Mulgoa and Oatley. The number of members who participated in this debate represents the gratitude of every member of the House for all the staff in all the State's hospitals—from the busiest Newcastle and Sydney hospitals to the hospitals in the most remote, rural and regional areas of New South Wales. The members of this House appreciate the work they do. I send a quick thank you also to the Minister for Health and Medical Research. No-one would question how hard the health Minister works. He has worked exceedingly hard.

Bravo to the member for Tweed for a very gracious speech. Members, especially Labor members, will support him in his quest to have free parking at the Tweed Hospital. The member for Shellharbour also applauded the health Minister and referred to the vital support we need to provide to low-paid workers, especially low-paid workers in our hospitals. The member for Albury and the member for Goulburn referred to the immensity of the healthcare system with its 145,000 staff, which shows how important healthcare workers are, and referred to the diversity of roles for hospital staff and their importance in our community, with which I agree. The member for Bankstown referred to the collective efforts of our communities, our workers, unions and councils, as well as the Government, that have been imperative in making this difficult time as successful as possible. In particular, the member for Bankstown praised the Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital.

The member for Newcastle highlighted the importance of parking. He declared it is something that is overrated but it can drive us nuts if you cannot find a parking space. Opposition members look forward to the completion of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass providing better access to the hospital. The member for Myall Lakes expressed appreciation for the Manning Base Hospital, which does a wonderful job, and in common with all members of this House and the community, he looks forward to the future Forster hospital. The member for Wyong referred to the Gosford Hospital and referred to the isolation of the Wyong Hospital. He emphasised the importance of parking for hospital workers because they are forced to use their cars if they cannot use public transport to get to work. Accessible and free parking around hospitals, especially for isolated areas, is a real necessity.

The member for Upper Hunter reminded me that country electorates have many hospitals. In his case there is a hospital in Gloucester, Singleton, Scone, Muswellbrook, Merriwa and Murrurundi. The electorate of the Northern Tablelands also has many hospitals. The member for Upper Hunter referred to how pleased he is with the upgrades to the hospitals at Singleton, Muswellbrook, Gloucester and Scone. The member for The Entrance referred to the extensive area served by the Central Coast Local Health District and the hard work of the staff. The member for Mulgoa referred to the challenges we face in 2020. The member for Oatley aptly described health workers as "healthcare heroes", which is what they are. During the debate all members who participated spoke about how much they love the Health Services Union and the Nurses and Midwives' Association. That is wonderful. We love them all. I thank the Government for supporting this important motion. We all want to say thank you to our healthcare workers. They all deserve our praise, especially in this difficult time. Bravo to them all. I urge all members to support the motion.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans):

The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.