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CARRINGTON RESIDENTS ACTION GROUP

26 July 2003

The Chair
Senator Jan McLucas
The Senate Select Committee on Medicare

At the end of June 2003 Carrington lost its' Medical Centre that opened in 1995. For only the second time in one hundred and thirty years we do not have a local doctor.

Carrington is an inner suburb of Newcastle that is unique geographically and culturally, as it is an island, though with time back filling has made the northern end appear to be part of the mainland.

To drive into Carrington you must cross a small beautiful bridge. People talk of "coming onto Carrington" not into Carrington. This has helped build a strong community and in days gone by some people have lived, worked and played on Carrington, sometimes rarely visiting Newcastle.

Obviously this is changing, as is the working port that employed so many, although the port is more efficient and productive for Australia's economy it employs only a fraction of the people it once employed.

The product of this history is that there are many retired and fragile people resident in Carrington. These people are experiencing many traumas due to the changes within Carrington. Approximately 35% of residents are over 65 years old and obviously retired. Carrington seems to have a high number of people in their eighties and nineties.

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Governments only give lip service to the common sense of Australians because they rarely talk to real people. Reliance on advice from Public Servants is fine but I can assure you that there are many more Australians looking at grass roots policy than there are public servants or politicians.

As the Senate Select Committee has heard Hunter Area Health and the Hunter Urban Division of General Practise have joined forces to develop an after hours system called the GP Access After Hours (GPAAH).

GPAAH is a new service that has been funded initially for two years. This service is a follow up on another program called MAGS, now running successfully for nearly four years in the Maitland area. This service however is an example of how left to their own devises our regions can construct a system to overcome problems in a cooperative and sensible manner.

This begs the question, should the government simply fund our region properly and let our decision makers sort it out and get on with the job.

I, for one am sure that given the chance our region can set an example of how to run the medical system. Grass roots decisions for a grass roots problem.

In our region we already have a fine example of an old State Government Board, the Maritime Services Board, being replaced by a local entity, Newcastle Port Corporation.

The Port Corporation has taken our port to new heights at almost every turn. It has also done this by changing from the old adversary system of the MSB to public consultation. The result has been a growth in acceptance and pride in the port. The port sets new export records virtually every year.

The Port Corporation is no Mickey Mouse example of what a region can do but a perfect example of where government should head. Regional funding, choice, and responsibility.

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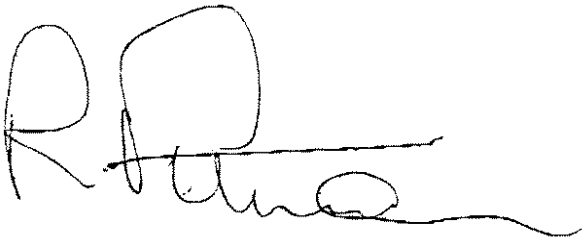
Whilst there is an imbalance of doctors domiciled in Capital City areas the payments to Regional Australia should increasingly reflect the imbalance by increasing payments to regional areas and decreasing payments to Capital City areas. The payments can be adjusted on a per capita basis. This system is easily adjusted and could be used to attract all necessary services to Regional and Rural Australia.

The Government needs to act NOW.

I sat through the day of the Public Hearing in Newcastle on last Wednesday and can thoroughly endorse the views of Professor Katherine McGrath, Dr Arne Sprogis, CEO Hunter Urban Division of General Practice, and Professor John Marley. I also endorse the views of the other speakers though I believe the first three speakers summed up the problems, put forward the solutions, and showed government the direction they should take.

The general debate was bipartisan and showed that the government has solutions available that are not "pie in the sky" but reasonable, cost effective and fair to all Australians.

My residents group would like to be kept informed of any developments and I will make myself available at short notice to any person who can help resolve our problems.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Pittman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Pittman
President CRAG