

buck-passing between Queensland Racing and Treasury to delay the process and avoid public scrutiny at all costs.

Brisbane Islamic Community

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport) (11.42 pm): Recently I met with Dr Mohammed Abdallah and other senior members of the Islamic community in Brisbane. Dr Abdallah is the Director of the Griffith Islamic Research Unit and Imam at the Kuraby mosque. Dr Abdallah told me of concerns expressed by himself and within the Islamic community over comments made by a journalist, Richard Kerbaj, writing in the *Australian* in April of this year. The series of articles draws links between funding of \$100,000 to the Griffith Islamic Research Unit provided by the Saudi government and terrorism. To suggest that accepting \$100,000, a sum which Dr Abdallah tells me goes primarily to employing his secretary, somehow equates to promoting Islamic extremism is drawing a pretty long bow. It was claimed in the *Australian* newspaper that the acceptance of the Saudi money was conditional on the promotion of wahabism—an extreme form of Islam—and that Dr Abdallah was the leader of a group called Tablighi Jamaat.

What is disturbing is that this line was taken up by District Court Judge Clive Wall on the Gold Coast. Judge Wall likened Griffith University's centre for Islamic studies as akin to the madrassas of Pakistan. He accused Dr Abdallah of being an agent of the Saudi government through which extremist views were being taught. Many members of the Islamic community have expressed to me their extreme disappointment at the treatment of one of their most respected and widely revered leaders. Dr Abdallah was a voice of calm and reason after the burning of the Kuraby mosque following the tragedy of 9-11. He was called upon to perform a similar function following the disturbances at Cronulla. He is spoken highly of amongst the younger members of the community. These young people all tell me of the excellent example Dr Abdallah sets for them as they face the challenges of being young Muslims in a secular world.

Dr Abdallah was also chosen to attend the 2020 Summit, an event to which I note neither Richard Kerbaj nor Judge Wall were invited. It is true that Dr Abdallah is connected with Tablighi Jamaat. This organisation is one which promotes peace and harmony and the Federal Police, the Queensland police and ASIO know that it does so. It should come as no surprise to anyone that universities actively seek funding from outside groups to continue research and study. The ANU does it. It gets money from the United Arab Emirates. The University of Melbourne gets \$2 million from the Sultan of Oman and even News Ltd, which the *Australian* newspaper is part of, received a \$400 million investment from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. I know that this does not make them a terrorism vehicle.

I note that these comments by the *Australian* newspaper and Judge Wall received very little traction and Dr Abdallah should take comfort from the public support he has received from the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and the Commissioner of Police, amongst others. On a personal level, I have known Dr Abdallah for many years. I have great respect for his level-headedness and ecumenical leadership of the Islamic community. He is an Australian of whom we should all be very proud.

Wide Bay-Burnett, Maternity Services

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (11.45 pm): I recently wrote to the health minister inquiring about the maternity services available for my constituents, and I table my letter and the minister's reply.

Tabled paper: Copy of letter, dated 7 April 2008, from Mr Messenger to the Minister for Health, Mr Stephen Robertson MP, relating to birthing services at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

Tabled paper: Copy of letter, dated 26 May 2008, from the Minister for Health, Mr Stephen Robertson MP, to Mr Messenger relating to birthing services at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

In my letter I made him aware of the fact that—

... there is a growing concern in the Bundaberg-Burnett community that the birthing facilities available at the Bundaberg Base Hospital are unsatisfactory, inadequate and placing the lives of women and their babies at unacceptable risk.

I asked for clarification on the number of infant deaths which have occurred at the hospital in the last 10 years and if he could provide a description of the exact services available to our families. I also acknowledged that the dedicated medical staff at the Bundaberg Base Hospital, in a very difficult working environment, perform miracles daily. In fact, they deliver little miracles. The minister in his reply informed me that peri-natal deaths, from 20 weeks gestation until 28 days post delivery, over the years 1997 to 2006 inclusive total 86 out of a total of 8,608 births for the Bundaberg Base Hospital. He claimed that this was below the state average over the same period, and I accept that and am grateful that he shared those figures.

The health minister's figures also reveal that for the nine years between 1997 and 2006 on average we have had 2.62 births a day. The difference between 2008 and 2006 is that the only private maternity services have closed in the Wide Bay-Burnett due to a lack of midwifery services and every birth in the Burnett-Bundaberg region must occur at the Bundaberg Base Hospital. This fact, along with the population growth, has taken the daily average birth rate from 2.62 to approximately 3.28. That is approximately 1,200 births per year. There are only four birthing suites at the Bundaberg Base Hospital