



Supply deal 'binds' Greens on hospice

By Victor Violante
 Chief Assembly Reporter

The ACT Greens could be bound by their agreement with Labor to support the sale of Clare Holland House, according to ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher.

Ms Gallagher said it would be fiscally irresponsible of the Greens to vote down the Government's proposed purchase of the public hospital from the Little Company of Mary Health Care for \$77 million simply because they opposed the reciprocal sale of the hospice for \$9 million.

Also, two clauses in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement, entered into by the two parties after last year's election, could bind the Greens to endorse an appropriation Bill for the deal when it came to a vote in the Legislative Assembly early next year.

Passage of the Bill is needed to release the funds to buy the hospital and sanction the sale of the hospice. According to ACT Treasury calculations, the acquisition of Calvary Hospital would save the ACT budget \$145 million over the next 20 years.

The agreement says, "The Greens pledge to: Following detailed pre-budget discussions, guarantee their support for the passage of Appropriation Bills for ordinary annual services of the Government" and "The parties confirm their commitment to fiscal responsibility and the maintenance of a balanced budget through the economic cycle."

Ms Gallagher said these clauses could preclude the Greens from opposing the Bill when it came to a vote.

"I think certainly we could argue that, and there's clauses in the agreement about the Greens guaranteeing supply and the passage of budget Bills and about being financially responsible, so they're all arguments the Government can prosecute," she said.

"I have to say that if it doesn't go ahead those issues about financing our other commitments, our election commitments, our

Greens Parliamentary Agreement commitments, they will be put under pressure if this sale doesn't go ahead for the simple reason that our budget will have to finance this as opposed to our accumulated cash."

But Greens Leader Meredith Hunter rejected this interpretation of the agreement.

"My interpretation of supply is an annual budget that delivers the funding to ensure day-to-day service delivery, I see quite clearly that the sale of Calvary Hospital is a matter outside of that," Ms Hunter said.

Despite their opposition to the sale of the hospice the Greens are yet to say whether they would vote down the appropriation Bill if the hospice remained part of the deal.

"We won't be pushed into making a premature decision. We will take our time."

Ms Gallagher, who is also Treasurer, urged the Greens to look at the financial benefits of having a second publicly owned hospital when they made their decision.

"I hope at the end of the day that they look at everything I'm doing to address people's concerns, that they look at the bigger picture of a brand new public hospital, that they look at the sustainability of our budget, that we've got a lot of pressure there and if this sale doesn't go ahead I can tell you the next few budgets are going to be very, very grim," Ms Gallagher said.

The Canberra Times revealed yesterday ACT Government backbencher John Hargreaves and former Government stalwart Wayne Berry, who retired from the Assembly last year after 19 years, were also opposed to the hospice sale.

Opposition spokesman Jeremy Hanson said the apparent division within ACT Labor Party ranks showed this deal was not what the community wanted. "What we're seeing here is disunity in the ACT Labor Party, Mr Hanson said. "Katy Gallagher and Jon Stanhope have been riding roughshod over the community and over the Labor Party."



NO OPTIONS: Health Minister Katy Gallagher says an agreement may force the Greens to support the sale of Clare Holland House.