



# Libs' bid to block sale of Calvary

## EXCLUSIVE

By Ewa Kretowicz

The Liberals will vote against the controversial sale of Calvary Hospital, leaving the ACT Government scrambling for Greens support to pass the \$77 million deal.

Opposition health spokesman Jeremy Hanson said the proposed buy-out had no proven health benefits and its economic arguments were flawed.

"I think that the argument that it becomes more efficient and effective because the bureaucracy takes it over is flawed," he said.

"There is nothing to suggest that ACT Health will do a better job than the Little Company of Mary just because they take over the bureaucracy."

The hospital already provided

top-quality public hospital care and the \$77 million could be spent reducing elective surgery lists, he said. "This could fund such facilities as a neurosurgery operating theatre [for] \$10.5 million, a surgical assessment and planning unit, \$4.1 million, an adult mental-health inpatient facility, \$2.29 million . . ."

ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher said the Liberals failed to understand the economic benefits.

"It was expected from the Liberals: they are not prepared to look at the big picture, they have failed to engage on it," she said.

The only way the Government could spend the \$200 million

needed to improve the hospital, without plunging the ACT further into deficit, was to own it, she said.

"Over a longer term, this is the most cost-effective way forward for our budget and that's something that the Liberals are just going to have to address."

Ms Gallagher challenged Mr Hanson to find \$147 million of savings – the amount Treasury said the purchase would save the ACT Government over 20 years.

"In government, you have to look at the big picture and the long term," she said.

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Mr Hanson said Ms Gallagher had confused accounting with the economics of public policy.

"There is an accounting treatment that should be the consequence of a decision, not the justification for a decision," he said.

With the Government and Opposition at loggerheads, Ms Gallagher now needs the Greens to pass the Bill that will allow the hospital to be bought.

Greens health spokeswoman Amanda Bresnan could not be interviewed yesterday but issued a statement.

"The Greens believe public health-care facilities should be in public hands. Ideally, we would like to see the exchange of Calvary Hospital go through, but we are concerned about the hospice [Clare Holland

House]," Ms Bresnan said.

The sale of the hospital depends on its current owner, the Little Company of Mary, buying the hospice for \$9 million.

"It is important that groups like the Palliative Care Society, Friends of the Hospice, and Health Care Consumers Association have their voices heard. I really hope LCM Health Care as well as the ACT Government is listening to what the ACT people want," Ms Bresnan said.

But Ms Gallagher said there was no room to negotiate on the sale of Clare Holland House.

"It's not a matter of me moving on the issues. The fact is the Little Company of Mary will not consider moving out of the hospital if they are not consolidating at Clare Holland House. It stands or it falls on its own."