Firies and ambos take safety gripes to street

By JILL POULSEN

THEY consistently take out the No. 1 and 2 spots as our most trusted professions but ambos and firies across the NT say their working conditions are “disgraceful”

Union members of both groups met outside Parliament House yesterday to gain support for their plight.

Alice Springs paramedic and union delegate Nikki Johnston was at the rally and said paramedics wanted to get the information out there “that it’s not all roses”. “We’re disgusted people are waiting half an hour for an ambulance when they are having a heart attack,” she said.

Ms Johnston said a lot of the circumstances paramedics had to deal with were out of their control.

“They’re out of our control but they’re within St John’s control,” she said.

“We care about our community, and we care about their safety.”

St John is currently in negotiations with United Voice, the union representing paramedics and firefighters in the NT, and has been for almost two years over a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

The two are at loggerheads over the issue of back pay. “Basically they are refusing to pay us the back pay they owe us for numerous things,” Ms Johnston said.

Just last week St John threatened to start docking the pay of paramedics if they continued to refuse to use Siren as a part of their industrial action, Siren is the service’s electronic patient record system.

St John NT director of ambulance operations Michael McKay said the company had decided to dock the pay of paramedics refusing to use Siren because of “operational issues”. “At the end of the day we are there for the public and they are our No. 1 priority... Siren hasn’t been used and it’s important for efficient patient management,” he said.

Firefighter and union delegate David Lines said firefigthers were exasperated that bargaining for a new agreement with the Territory Government had dragged on for two years.

He told the rally that cuts to the service were endangering the public.

“We care about our community... we care about their safety”

Vatskalis leaves with baby news

LONG-SERVING Casuarina MP Kon Vatskalis was celebrated last night in Parliament by political friends and foes alike for his years of service to the community.

Mr Vatskalis saved one of his best Parliamentary surprises for last, when he told the legislature he and wife Aihong are expecting a baby.

Mr Vatskalis leaves the Labor Party after 13 years. He was the most experienced member of the Labor Party having served in Labor Governments under former chief ministers Clare Martin and Paul Henderson.

He has held the portfolios of health, infrastructure, local government, transport and ethnic affairs among others.

Labor candidate, 27-year-old Lauren Moss, will run in the Casuarina bye-election to replace Mr Vatskalis, expected in October. The CLP have not yet named a candidate.

Outback drive-offs fuel anger

ROADHOUSES on the Stuart Highway are uniting to help reduce the number of travelers who drive off without paying for petrol.

Director of Kulgera Trading Company Chris Le Page said the roadhouses have started to warn others up the track of approaching crooks.

“We report it and no one on the Stuart Highway will release fuel,” he said.

“It’s pretty frustrating, it costs quite a bit to get it here.”

“We have got to pay for that fuel... it certainly hurts, it hurts big time.”

Mr Le Page said he has lost about $800 due to drive-offs over the years.

Last week was the third incident that Stuart’s Well Roadhouse’s Spud Murphy had experienced in the 16 months he has been the owner.

“The last one was I think for about $80 (and) in the last 16 months (we’ve lost) near the $500-$600 mark,” he said.

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