



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard 27 November 2001

PUBLIC HOUSING

Ms STRUTHERS (Alger—ALP) (11.55 a.m.): Two recent events have had a devastating impact on our Queensland and Australian communities: when the captain of the Norwegian ship the *Tampa* obeyed the humane law of the high seas and rescued a boatload of refugees and set sail for Australian shores, and when the terrorists hijacked three passenger airlines on a mission to instil fear in our global community. The two events began poles apart. One was a humane gesture by the Norwegian captain; the other was the most brutal act of inhumanity. The two soon became manipulated by a federal government desperate to save its hide. Once manipulated and locked together in the public eye, these events fuelled feelings of immense fear and insecurity.

I know that some people fear that terrorists may strike Queensland and our Australian shores. I know that some people fear that terrorists may be harbouring as refugees to enter our borders. I know that some people believe that refugees may become a burden on our fragile economy, taking jobs away from our citizens. I know that many people cannot keep a secure roof over their own heads and fear that we cannot afford to house refugees. Instead of easing these fears, instead of focusing on policies to improve job security, health, education and housing, the Howard government cruelly fuelled these fears. Instead of bridging the divide to bring Australians together as a caring community behind the asylum seekers, Howard drove the wedge further in.

Today I want to focus on housing. The need for a national housing plan did not register on the federal election radar at all. Anthony Albanese, as former Parliamentary Secretary for Housing, made a courageous attempt to promote Labor's plan for affordable housing, but it had little chance of surfacing in the wake of the federal government fuelled *Tampa* crisis. Today, I am calling on the Howard government to leave the shame of their election strategy behind them and get on with the job of providing jobs and affordable housing for all Australians.

Local people in my electorate of Alger have benefited greatly from the state government's social and community housing programs. We have comfortable, well designed, new and affordable seniors units in a number of suburbs, including Acacia Ridge. As the minister mentioned this morning, we have the smart housing design in Parkinson, a new area in my electorate that the minister launched last week. All of these things are great initiatives but, sadly, the impact of the GST on the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, the impact on the Queensland housing program alone, has been a loss of around \$60 million a year. There is more available land at Acacia Ridge—plenty of vacant sites, plenty of old buildings that need renovating, plenty of land to build new seniors units that are much needed, and new housing for families. But there is no additional money coming forth from the Commonwealth government through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

Anthony Albanese, in launching Labor's plan for affordable housing, put on the record that currently there are about 210,000 households on public housing waiting lists nationally. Many having been waiting for more than five years. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that more than 100,000 Australians, including 17,000 children, sleep every night without a roof of their own over their own heads. Anthony Albanese promoted a national housing alliance between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, heralding a new era of national cooperation on housing issues. What did the federal government do? Ignored it! In fact, it made a mockery of this. Amanda Vanstone, in a speech at the national housing conference, which she videotaped and sent—she did not front up

because she knew that she had nothing really of substance to provide—criticised Labor's plan for affordable housing. We put it on the agenda. We tried to get it up. Sadly, other events took over.

National Shelter, a non-government organisation that has been lobbying for many years—putting in tireless efforts to improve access to public housing and affordable housing in Queensland and across Australia—also sought to get housing on the national agenda during the federal election with some very comprehensive plans, including a housing assistance policy that will address the housing needs of low-income earners. It will not only require the maintenance of the present level of social housing; it will look at areas of unmet need and more capital investment in housing. In fact, Roksana Khan in her media release stated that the supply side initiatives like increased rent assistance are not enough by themselves to meet housing needs. She stated further—

We need capital investment targeted to boost a range of housing options and have job creation in mind.

That is what we need.
