



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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STATE HOUSING AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (4.48 p.m.): I rise to speak to the State Housing and Other Acts Amendment Bill. Mr Deputy Speaker McNamara, while I cannot quote Francis Ford Coppola as you did earlier when you spoke to the bill, I will quote Woodrow Wilson, who said that if you think about what you ought to do for other people your character will take care of itself. This is a valid point to consider while we debate the State Housing and Other Acts Amendment Bill.

The Queensland Housing Commission is a statutory body through which the Department of Housing delivers housing services to Queenslanders. These services include housing loan products, subsidised residential tenancies and community housing. The State Housing and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002 aims to implement recommendations contained in the competition impact statement arising from the national competition policy review of the State Housing Act 1945.

On the Sunshine Coast we have an active tenancy group of public housing people who conduct such things as garden competitions. I commend them and also Kevin Treschman, a director on the Sunshine Coast who does a terrific job and who is very quick to assist with any problems that may arise. The bill proposes to make it clear that the minister administering the State Housing Act 1945 is the appropriate person to exercise the powers of the minister under the Land Act in so far as the powers apply to commercial state perpetual town leases issued under the State Housing Act. Today I met with Father John Dobson, a well-respected Dean for the north coast area. Father John is based out of the Caloundra Catholic parish. I know that he, too, shares a genuine concern for ensuring that Sunshine Coast people have a roof over their heads.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: Father John has met with the minister and departmental officials to detail the possibility of more Sunshine Coast projects in the future. Father John told me that the minister and the department gave him a good hearing. Let us hope that more good public housing eventuates for Sunshine Coast residents.

Tonight's federal budget must deliver for Queensland. If the federal government is fair dinkum about delivering services for Queensland, its budget must, as a bare minimum, honour its commitments in areas such as specific purpose payments, particularly in areas such as housing, disability services and education. \$18 million is required for this state from the Commonwealth to meet the share of unmet demand in the area of disability services alone. Overall, the federal budget needs to deliver a funding package for Queensland that recognises our role as the engine room of the national economy. The federal government must urgently address the damage caused by its disastrous decision to use hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to prop up private health funds at the expense of public hospitals. The figure for health is an immediate, additional \$200 million to address the impacts on public hospitals of the federal government's disastrous policies.

The problem has been exacerbated by the medical indemnity and public liability insurance fiasco and by the lack of federally funded GPs in many of our rural and regional centres. If the Howard government were fair dinkum about providing proper funding for Queensland, it would immediately reverse the downward slide in funding for social housing programs. On top of the \$90 million that Queensland has effectively lost under the current agreement, preliminary estimates suggest that we stand to miss out on a further \$109 million under the new CSHA starting mid-2003. This downward spiral in federal funding makes no sense when demand for public housing is rising and homelessness is

increasing, and when we need to secure jobs in the building industry in the light of uncertainty over interest rates and as GST compensation offered through the First Home Owners Scheme starts to wind back.

In the past the opposition spokesperson has mentioned that the state government does nothing for seniors or those in receipt of Commonwealth pensions who reside in such public housing accommodation. The simple fact is that a great number of Queenslanders will have access to government concessions and business discounts through a fairer Seniors Card means test delivered in the last state budget. The state Labor Beattie government has expanded the Seniors Card test to recognise 60 to 64-year-olds who have the low income health care card, HCC. The decision has removed an historic anomaly whereby single retirees on \$41,000 a year who had a Commonwealth Seniors Card were unable to obtain a Queensland Seniors Card but single retirees with a low income health care card on less than \$16,380 a year were not. This will see a further 1,430 Queenslanders now being eligible for the benefits of a Seniors Card. The cost of this change will be \$600,000 over three years. That is a commitment that this government gives and will continue to give for years to come. The benefits of a Seniors Card include concessions on electricity, registration and transport. Seniors Cards are a Labor government initiative which give older Queenslanders access to government concessions and which offer discounts at participating businesses to help every dollar go further. It is about giving back something to those who have contributed for decades.

Currently, 381,440 Queenslanders benefit from a Seniors Card. Those of us on the Labor side of politics have a genuine concern for those less fortunate. I commend the minister on the numerous speeches he has given to the House on this subject. Being a member of the minister's backbench advisory committee, I know from the numerous briefings how he and his department feel in terms of addressing the federal government's poor form, form that is supported by this so-called opposition. Therefore, I commend the bill to the House.