



Speech by

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Hansard 21 August 2003

APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—ONP) (5.03 p.m.): Although I was not a member of Estimates Committee F, I am pleased to be able to respond to the proceedings, particularly in relation to my electorate of Gympie. In relation to the issue of affordable and available housing, due to the recent rise in property values, rent prices have risen, resulting in a shortage of housing for the lower end of the market. It is the lower income families and individuals who are suffering the most. Many of these people are on either a pension or unemployment benefit. Although these people are entitled to rental assistance this amount has not kept up with the rise in cost of renting.

It appears that lately the issue of housing has become a political football, with both the federal and state governments blaming each other for the current crisis. The federal government could assist in alleviating the financial burden on renters by increasing the rent subsidy and the state could reassess its budget priorities by concentrating more on the essentials of life such as housing instead of non-essentials such as stadiums and copious printing and propaganda which I am sure has cost taxpayers millions of dollars over the last few years.

Let us face it: voters generally turn against government due to a reduction in the quality of their lifestyle and the ability for them to access vital services. No voter would say at election time, 'Gee, we don't have a big enough football stadium. Let's throw this government out.' People worry about having a job, having their operations, being able to have their teeth seen to in a period of less than three years, having a roof over their heads and the literacy of their children—real issues.

With our elderly and disabled population growing rapidly, government policy really needs to be geared to the needs of these people. There will be fewer people employed in the future, and fewer people with the ability to afford private rental. It is a sad indictment of our society that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing daily. This means that governments have to cater to those at the lower socioeconomic end more than ever before. If we cannot find people jobs and state schools have too many students per class for teachers to teach properly and give each child the attention and discipline they need, then many will continue to remain unemployable and on social benefits, which restricts them in being able to pay current rent prices.

In reference to disability services, the government policy of insisting everyone with a disability be integrated back into society instead of cared for by responsible staff in an appropriate environment has put enormous financial and emotional pressure on hundreds of families within my electorate. There is no sense of security for future people with disabilities. Now that those people who used to reside in facilities around 20 years ago are reaching their 50s, many of their primary carers are well into their 70s and 80s and are desperately concerned about the future of their loved ones.

One example I can cite for a person with a disability to not be left alone is that of a young man in my electorate. This fellow has a severe brain injury and is living in public housing. This man has a carer five hours per week, which is nowhere near what he actually requires. This man has recently been beaten up in his own home by local thugs, who also managed to steal this man's new television and video recorder, which had been bought for him by his mother. The man's injuries meant that a DSQ employee insisted he be given a brain scan to assess the damage.

The real underlying problem is that this fellow is too afraid of the perpetrators to make a complaint to the police out of fear of retribution. His mother, the police and I have tried to encourage him to make a complaint, but he is simply too scared. Effectively, these thugs can come back and bash

him again and take whatever they like, because this man is vulnerable and in a position where he is open to future danger and abuse because he has no alternative.

While I am well aware of the standard of many of the institutions and the deep sleep treatment back in the seventies, it would have been much more appropriate and financially feasible to clean them up, so to speak, employ decent people and ensure that each facility was accredited, with each facility having departmental staff spot checking them on a random basis to ensure that all residents and clients were being looked after instead of abused and taken advantage of, as they had been under the old system. The current system does not work. There are too many people being left with inadequate or no support at all, particularly in the electorate of Gympie.