



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Wednesday, 29 March 2006

EVENTIDE NURSING HOME, CHARTERS TOWERS

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.10 pm): This morning on behalf of the residents of Charters Towers and the surrounding districts I tabled a petition of 2,726 signatures opposing any plans to privatise the state government owned Eventide Nursing Home at Charters Towers. The petition is simple and does not ask for much. It simply calls on the government to recognise that the Eventide aged-care facility has provided a wonderful service to our frail and elderly citizens since it was built in 1929. Therefore, the residents of Charters Towers vehemently oppose any plans or proposals to sell off or privatise this facility.

The petition also calls on the state government to provide adequate funding and staffing levels to enable this facility to function at full capacity. When the Beattie government handed down its mini-budget last year it revealed draconian plans to offload home care services and adopt Forster's recommendation to privatise state government nursing homes. This announcement has caused grave concern to the Charters Towers community which is calling on the state government to give a rock solid guarantee that the future care of our elderly will be maintained.

On 8 November 2005 in state parliament, the Minister for Health claimed that the Beattie government would consider on a site-by-site basis whether to privatise a Queensland aged-care facility and that any decision would only be made after extensive consultation with staff, residents and the community. The community of Charters Towers is sending a clear message through this 2,700-strong petition. It vehemently opposes any plans or proposals to privatise the Eventide aged-care facility now and in the future and calls on the state government to recognise that the community has made its decision and accept that decision.

The petition also calls on this government to fully reopen the Pandanus unit at the Eventide aged-care facility after the health minister's department removed 20 beds, forcing the partial closure of the unit in 2002. The community of Charters Towers wants its beds back. The department had no right to take these beds without consulting the community, particularly the elderly, who are now forced onto waiting lists in towns hundreds of kilometres away.

It is ridiculous. We have a multimillion-dollar facility partially closed and not operating to its full capacity, yet our elderly are forced to separate from family and loved ones to other care facilities in other towns hundred of kilometres away. It is just common sense that the Pandanus unit beds should be restored and the unit reopened for the benefit of the community, particularly in the area of aged care and dementia. If we have the facility, why not use it?

I challenge and dispute the health minister's claims that the removal of 20 beds from the Pandanus unit and the unit not being reopened or utilised for dementia-specific care was because of staffing issues. If this was the reason, then why did the minister recently boast in the local newspaper of increasing clinical staff levels since July 2005 by 811 nurses and 298 allied health professionals? Why did he also promise to inject a massive \$6 billion into the Queensland health budget?

The government has a moral obligation to provide an appropriate standard of care for our elderly, who have paid their dues. This is why the residents of Charters Towers call on the state government to heed the voice of the people and provide an assurance that the state will continue to maintain ownership of the Eventide aged-care facility and that adequate funding and staffing levels will be provided to enable this facility to function to its full capacity. It is the residents currently residing in the Eventide aged-care facility who originally paid for and built this wonderful facility with their hard-earned tax dollars.