



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

Hansard Wednesday, 7 October 2009

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### **MOTION: PENSIONERS, PUBLIC HOUSING RENTS**

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House opposes any move by the Bligh Labor government to use the recent changes in the pension to increase public housing rents for pensioners.

This evening members of the House have an opportunity to deliver hope for Queensland pensioners who live in public housing. It is an opportunity to put on the public record whether they support ripping off Queensland seniors.

**Ms Jones** interjected.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I look forward to the honourable member for Ashgrove coming over to this side of the House to support our motion and all the other Labor members standing up for pensioners, whom they claim to be in their heartland constituency. It is a test of the trust that we know this government has abrogated on behalf of its pensioner constituents when it now claims to be able to take a quarter of the pension rise that has been given by the Rudd Labor government.

Last week we had the Premier saying it is well known that people in public housing have to pay a quarter of their income for public housing. The next day there was an outcry, and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Treasurer Wayne Swan said that is not something they should be doing and they had actually discouraged Labor governments from doing it. Then the Premier said that she would look for a national approach. We do not want a national approach in Queensland. We want a Queensland approach to our public housing and to our pensioners. They should not have to lose part of the \$30 increase that was recently given to them next year following the end to the moratorium on rents. They should not lose another \$7.50 from their \$30 rise.

As I have said, it is typical of this Labor government. It is typical of the Premier last week waking up with a bad headline and trying to do anything she can to get rid of that headline by 6 pm that day. The Premier backflipped on the position whether pensioners had to pay 25 per cent of their \$30 a week increase next year. She backflipped on that, saying that she would look for a national approach. As I have said, Queenslanders want a Queensland approach. It is very clear she is at odds with her federal masters and there is no way that money should be taken from those pensioners. This is an opportunity to put the worries of those 27,000 single pensioners who live in Queensland public housing to rest.

When the Rudd government announced its intention to raise the single pension by \$30 a week, the Prime Minister promised pensioners that aged-care facilities and state housing authorities would not be able to skim profits off the top. Now we are seeing Labor governments around the nation lining up for their share. Isn't it interesting that when the Premier looks for a national approach on public housing she does not look for a national approach on how to manage the economy, or how to balance the budget, or how to keep a AAA credit rating? On all those aspects the Premier has failed. She has failed to keep a AAA credit rating, has failed to manage the economy properly and is giving us budget deficits greater than any other state in the country.

This is a Premier who, with her own Queensland style approach, has given us borrowings that are about 50 per cent of all the other states combined in the next year. That is the sort of management that the Premier has given us in Queensland. Yet when it comes to public housing the Premier is happy to take a quarter of the pension increase in rent. That is in the Labor DNA: take the money from whomever you can whenever you can to try to balance the budget. The Bligh Labor government has said it will not touch the increase for 12 months, but the Premier will not guarantee that the money will stay in pensioners' pockets. As I said, the Premier has indicated that department of housing rents will rise in line with increases of previous years. Her statement was, 'The only difference this year is we are giving a 12-month holiday in recognition of how long it has been since there has been a pension increase.'

Queensland pensioners are doing it tough. Even with the increase, a single pensioner receives just \$330 and typically spends about \$75 on food for the week. This state government literally wants to take away 10 per cent of these pensioners' hard-won food allowance. The increase in rent of \$7.50 a week, or \$400 each year, will be a burden for every single pensioner in Queensland. These pensioners have also been hit by higher electricity prices. The price of electricity has gone up by 40 per cent over the last three years. I know that gas prices in Toowoomba have gone up a massive amount. We had a fuel tax overnight of more than 9c a litre and have seen the rising cost of groceries.

To put it into perspective, what the Premier will be taking away from pensioners when housing rents are allowed to increase is two litres of milk and a loaf of bread every single week. In return, this government will receive just over \$200,000 in revenue—straight from our pensioners living in public housing. That is an additional income for this government of \$10.5 million a year. It just shows how desperate they are in a government where we have an income of \$37 billion. But thanks to the economic mismanagement of this state by this Premier and this Treasurer, we are now spending \$39 billion a year. With some proper fiscal management, they would not have to try to extricate that \$10.5 million a year from our pensioners.

Let us look at the expenditure of this government. It spends \$38 million in salaries alone to employ 640 spin doctors and \$65 million to \$70 million a year in government advertising. This government spends more on advertising in this state than McDonald's, Coke, Qantas, Myer, Mitsubishi and Toyota. That is what the government spends its money on. Yet it is trying to extricate \$10½ million from the pensioners in this state. It spends \$1.2 million on pot plants, \$54 million on stationery, \$7.2 million on subscriptions and \$9.23 million to purchase 2.3 million reams of desktop printing paper.

A great example that we have seen from this government is the \$5 million spent on the defunct North Bank project, which we were told would not cost taxpayers one cent. \$5 million was spent on North Bank. The honourable Deputy Premier used to come in here and say, 'We'll take it back and look at it again, but it will not cost taxpayers one cent.' A million dollars has been spent on advertising and promoting the largely abandoned Toward Q2 program, which was a straight lift from New South Wales. Most recently, another million dollars was spent on the 'saving the Premier's job' campaign as she went around the state. And we have the promise of even more—perhaps a letter being sent to every resident of Queensland to promote the asset sales that the Premier misled the people of Queensland about in the lead-up to the last election.

Perhaps there would be some comfort for pensioners if they felt their \$400 a year was going to additional housing or to improve the standard of housing stocks, but the state's own contribution on social rental housing dropped last year as the Bligh Labor government shirked its responsibility to the federal government. The Labor Party is now split over this issue with one side—the federal side—promising one thing and the others taking it away.

Even those from their own side are criticising this government and this Premier. Wayne Swan, the Treasurer, accused the Premier of pickpocketing pensioners. He told ABC Radio—

We put in place a one-off permanent increase in the pension and that is meant to go directly to the pockets of pensioners, not to be clawed back in some sneaky way by the state premiers.

...

For the state governments to come along and pickpocket some of that is unacceptable.

Those are the words of the federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan. There is no justification whatsoever that any Premier can claim for the rent increase—absolutely none. The federal community services minister, Jenny Macklin, described the move to gobble up the pension increase by rental increases as totally unacceptable. She said—

It is totally unacceptable that the states are only going to allow the full value of the pension rise to go for a year.

She said—

They have waited a long time for this pension rise. We want it going into their purses and wallets, not gobbled up by rents.

**Ms Struthers:** Eleven years they waited.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** That is from a fellow member of EMILY's List. Even the erstwhile Julia Gillard, the Deputy Prime Minister, said—

That conversation is continuing but I believe the goal is clear. We want to make sure that pensioners benefit from the pension rise.

That is the Premier's chance to help Queensland single pensioners—the widows and widowers who are struggling to cope financially after losing a spouse. This is the Premier's chance to give some hope to people who fought hard for their pension rise and who deserve their pension rise only to see a greedy state government try to take it away. To have members opposite screaming and yelling out shows their real position with regard to pensioners who have had a \$30 a week pension rise. There they are over the other side when they should be over this side supporting this motion because it will help pensioners throughout the state who deserve their pension rise. To see those opposite carry on in such a feral and disappointing way is disgraceful. We are standing up for the pensioners of Queensland. I commend the motion to the House.

**Ms Bligh** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Premier! The member for Burdekin, are you seconding the motion?