



Speech by

Mandy Johnstone

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Wednesday, 7 October 2009

MOTION: PENSIONERS, PUBLIC HOUSING RENTS

Ms JOHNSTONE (Townsville—ALP) (6.00 pm): The bottom line is that the Bligh government has agreed to a 12-month moratorium on any rent increases for single pensioners in social housing. We also agree with the federal government that pensioners and seniors are doing it tough right now. We know that every little bit helps. The Leader of the Opposition knows this, too. He knows full well that we agreed to a moratorium. He knows full well that the Premier has placed this issue firmly on the national agenda at the next meeting of Premiers and Chief Ministers in November. Today's charade by the Leader of the Opposition serves just one purpose: to cause unnecessary concern and angst in our community. It is scaremongering and sensationalism at its very worst.

The Leader of the Opposition should also know that the Bligh government has embarked on the biggest ever investment in social housing: \$1 billion plus. He also knows that for 11 years public housing languished under the Howard government. Already in Townsville I am seeing the spin-offs of this unprecedented investment. I am thrilled to see a significant boost to social housing stock in my own backyard.

As with any other development in my electorate, I support projects that stack up environmentally, socially and financially. The social housing that is being built right now in Townsville ticks all the right boxes, especially when it means that seniors in my community have a place to call home—like Auntie Beryl Gorringer, who has just moved into her brand-new seniors unit on Palm Island.

Ms Struthers: She has a lovely garden.

Ms JOHNSTONE: She has. I have been there three times now. She is a wonderful woman and she is very grateful to have a place to call home. The benefits of the building work in social housing in Townsville are twofold: we are putting roofs over people's heads who desperately need them and we are generating jobs for workers in the local building industry. It does not get much better than that.

Let us talk about housing and seniors. We have 10,470 dwellings across Queensland for people who are aged 55 years or older. Forty-five per cent of households in social housing have at least one member who is aged 55 years or older. We are rolling out more homes for seniors, with our unprecedented investment in new social housing in Townsville, Toowoomba, Tugun—you name it. There is also Home Assist Secure, whereby we provide free information to seniors about home maintenance and repairs. That is another state government initiative to make life safer and more secure for seniors. There is also Home and Community Care Home Modifications Services, helping frail and elderly people who need support with modifications around the home and helping them to get around that bit easier. These modifications mean that seniors can stay in their homes longer. Last year more than 1,000 homes were modified for seniors or people with a disability.

We have bond loans and rental grants to help seniors get into the private rental market. Our concessions for seniors are among the most comprehensive in the country. We provide a range of concessions on the cost of electricity, reticulated natural gas, ambulance, car registration, dental, spectacle supply, medical aids, electricity and life support, fishing permits as well as public transport costs, including local rail, bus and ferry travel and long distance travel within Queensland and a wide range of business discounts.

Mark my words, the Bligh government does not turn its back on our battlers. We are doing everything we can to make their lives that little bit better. That is what good, responsible governments do.