



Speech by

Ted Sorensen

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

Hansard Wednesday, 7 October 2009

MOTION: PENSIONERS, PUBLIC HOUSING RENTS

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (6.04 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. If you are a single age pensioner, the maximum you will get in your fortnightly pension is about \$671.90. Of that amount, you will receive around \$56 to assist you with pharmaceuticals, utilities, the GST and the telephone at the higher internet rate. Our pensioners cannot afford any more penny pinching from this government without a complete review of their living expenses in today's world.

I speak firsthand with the knowledge of how this group is already suffering under the burden of other increases that have already been placed on them. In my community there are a number of public housing units. The Labor government is giving with one hand and taking with the other. That is nothing short of pickpocketing the most vulnerable people in our community.

My wife, who is on our local Meals on Wheels committee, sees firsthand how hard it is for these pensioners. Over the past couple of years her committee has not increased the cost of meals and instead chooses to fundraise to keep these meals at an affordable price to make sure that this section of our community has the nourishment that they need and that they are at least able to afford good, nutritional food. Some of these people are confined to their homes and they have little or no prospect of getting out from under the huge burden that is already placed on them by spiralling costs, such as the cost of electricity, the cost of petrol when the fuel subsidy was done away with and the cost of food. Also, some of these older pensioners are experiencing rises in the cost of health care. Recently, a pensioner was sent home from the hospital at Hervey Bay at about 9.30 at night in a taxi. She had to pay for that ride when she got home. Things like that are pretty expensive for those people.

At Christmas I also have the pleasure of delivering meals on wheels to the pensioners in my area and I see some of the people who are out there, such as the lady in the wheelchair who cannot get around much and who has to pay taxi fares so that she can go down town. People like to have their mobility scooters. Without this \$400 increase, people could pay for their mobility scooters just so they could get around. Recently we had the Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs in Hervey Bay when we broke the world record for having the longest convoy of motor scooters. It was great to see those pensioners getting out and about and being able to participate in our community. But we cannot keep burdening them with costs such as this \$400 increase in one year. It is an enormous increase for these pensioners who have fought for this country.

I have also seen an old guy with an oxygen bottle who gets around in a wheelchair. I have seen people suffering from cancer in their homes. Sometimes it is heartbreaking to see them. You sit there and talk to them, but you cannot spend the time with them that you would like to.

By increasing the rent, what choice do these people have but to cut back on the necessities of life? I am afraid for the outcome of this increase on their day-to-day living and the untold stress that it will create. Therefore, I call on this government to abstain from increasing these rents. Under this government's public housing rents, the rental cost for a single pensioner will rise by \$7.50 a week next year. This is just a money grab from these pensioners. It is only going to increase government revenue by around \$200,000 a week, totalling about \$10 million a year. You only have to read what Wayne Swan had to say about this issue. He accused the Premiers of pickpocketing pensioners as they vowed to take whatever action—

(Time expired)