



Speech by

Dr Alex Douglas

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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GAVEN ELECTORATE, HARDSHIP

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (10.08 pm): Nowhere are current hardships experienced by the unemployed and low-income workers being felt more than in my electorate of Gaven. If the walls of my office could tell stories, you would hear tales of people facing constant struggles to obtain food or housing and relying on local groups to provide them with assistance. To illustrate the difficulties, one has to look no further than the Nerang Neighbourhood Centre, which runs a food bank for the needy. Only last year the food bank was providing 12 boxes of food per week, but this has skyrocketed to 120 boxes a week. The centre is in the process of seeking funding to start a Get Set for Work program in Nerang to improve the job prospects of many of these people living off Centrelink payments. There are 2,653 people in the Gaven electorate currently receiving jobseeker Centrelink benefits, and this number increased in June by about four per cent.

People are doing it tough on the coast. Just recently I had a couple who live in rented accommodation with their three children come to my office desperate for social housing because of their worsening financial situation. One of the really sad points about their visit was that one of the partners was morbidly obese and had wanted to have lap band surgery but they could no longer afford to have health insurance to cover the operation. They told me that they had to stop paying their home, contents and car insurance as well. They had expenses of \$2,427 a fortnight and were receiving income of \$1,762, made up of Centrelink payments and a Defence Service pension. Despite living in the same rental accommodation for the past 18 months, their finances had become an intolerable burden and they could no longer afford their medications or the \$500 they had budgeted for food. They were paying \$520 a week for rented housing. These are normal costs on the coast. Because of the enormous shortage of housing on the Gold Coast they were having extreme problems finding something cheaper. Similarly, a father of two children came to my office desperate for assistance. He said that he could either feed his children on the streets or keep them under a roof without food.

Small businesses are also doing it really tough on the Coast. Unemployment in the construction industry is forcing tradespeople to leave in droves to find work in other areas, and this causes further downward pressure on spending. Our local Nerang chamber of commerce has reported that small business sales are down between 15 and 20 per cent. For example, a respectable tiling business in Nerang has been operating for 40 years and they have never seen it so tough before. They are not sure how much longer they will survive in this environment. Honourable members will hear this story over and over again. The flow-on effect of this struggle leaves small business owners in dire situations. They are forced to reduce staffing hours, creating even more underemployment for residents, and the owners find themselves working 80 hours a week just to support their families. They are in a pressure cooker just to make ends meet. This is coupled with the constant rise in the cost of living and can lead to severe mental health and stress related problems.

Small business is at the heart of the economy and holds the key to delivering jobs to people across my electorate of Gaven. We must be working towards smaller government, less red tape and lower taxes to give small businesses the fuel they need not only to survive but also to flourish in undoubtedly one of the best places in the world to live.

(Time expired)