



Speech by

Jo-Ann Miller

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

MOTION: AGED CARE

 **Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House:

- Notes the Premier's statement that his government plans to exit the provision of aged-care services;
- Condemns the Newman government's actions creating uncertainty and anxiety over the future of nursing home beds at Eventide Home, Ashworth House, Cooinda House and the Moreton Bay Nursing Care Unit in Brisbane;
- Notes the actions of the government have occurred without a mandate and without any consultation being undertaken by the health minister;
- Acknowledges the distress the health minister's actions are causing aged and frail residents, their families and staff; and
- Directs the health minister to halt all such closures of nursing beds or health facilities including the Wynnum Hospital without first facing meetings of residents, relatives, patients and staff at each facility to provide detailed explanations of the LNP government's actions and to commit to genuine consultations.

This cruel and heartless LNP government is waging a war on the poor, the vulnerable and the aged people of this state. The government is destroying the communities of people who have lived in state owned caravan parks for many years. Many of these people are old and many of them are frail. These low-cost forms of social housing meet the needs of older Queenslanders living within their means, doing the very best they can on limited incomes. Now they are being thrown out so that this government can sell a public asset out from under them. That is what it is, purely and simply asset sales, so that the older people get thrown out onto the streets. Residents of Cannon Hill's Monte Carlo Caravan Park, Woombye Gardens Caravan Park and the Lazy Acres Caravan Park at Hervey Bay know that this government treats them very poorly. They are very vulnerable people, many of them aged. We now have 'Landlord Minister' Dr Flegg evicting long-term residents of public housing because they do not fit his profile of need. I have been approached by a constituent, a resident of public housing who has care of an adult daughter with an intellectual disability, who only this week has received what can only be known as an eviction notice from the home she has lived in for many years. Shame on this LNP government, shame!

Like thousands of Queenslanders, I was shocked by the announcement that 80 residents of Eventide at Brighton are to be evicted by June next year, with 20 to go before Christmas. What a Christmas gift for these frail aged from this LNP government. Out you go; that is your happy Christmas present from this mob. Places are supposed to be found in other aged-care facilities, but anyone who has tried to find suitable care for their parents in the community and also in the private sector knows how difficult this can be. The anger, frustration and fear felt by residents and families in meeting with Queensland Health executives at Eventide last Wednesday afternoon was nothing short of heart-rending. The staff, praised by all, were crying. They were in tears. Their work is more than just a job. It is more than a pay packet. They are part of the Eventide community and now they are being evicted as well. Seventy health workers face being sacked by this cruel and heartless government. Let us not pretend that they are voluntary separations. They are going to be sacked.

It is understandable that the Premier, as a newly arrived Queenslander, does not know the history of Eventide and its role in the Queensland community. The Minister for Health should know better. Eventide aged-care facilities have been part of the social fabric of this state for some 60 years. The Premier has said himself that aged-care is not the business of his government. The last conservative government in Queensland was firmly committed to supporting and expanding state run aged-care facilities. Perhaps the Premier should have a quiet chat with the chair of the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service Board, Mike Horan, because he knows the history. But I bet the Premier is too arrogant to pick up the phone.

Perhaps he should also be looking over his shoulder at backbenchers wondering if their local hospital and health service board now see the green light to close aged-care beds in their electorates. Well, let me say to the LNP backbench 'You better check what's happening locally.' The voters will be bashing your doors down soon because it is only a matter of time before these local hospital and health service boards close down the aged-care beds in your electorate. Just ask the soon-to-be former members for Sandgate and Lytton. Their own government has cut them loose just as they are going to cut the rest of the members of the government loose. As a former minister in the Borbidge-Sheldon government, Mr Horan was a fervent supporter of Eventide and good on him. He has also recently stated that there will be no reduction in state provided aged-care beds in the hospital and health service that he is in charge of. Good on Mike Horan, but I wonder how long that will last.

The CEO of Metro North Hospital and Health Service, Professor Keith McNeil, has apologised to the residents of Ashworth House at Zillmere for the stuff up in the letters sent out last Wednesday stating 'aged care beds will be incrementally closed.' If you were 86 years old and received a letter like this how would you feel? I can tell members how they feel. Those old people feel angry and they feel betrayed by this terrible LNP government. It now appears that Ashworth House is not to close high-care beds, but this is what was said, 'There will be a progressive closure of non-complex residential aged-care beds only' elsewhere in Metro North Hospital and Health Service, meaning two facilities within the Eventide campus at Brighton.

Moving aged-care patients is very traumatic for those high-care patients. It is traumatic to the point, we believe, of hastening death. Even if this is not the intention of the government's decision, it is a possible outcome. This is a cruel, cold reality. The famous green light of the Bjelke-Petersen government seems to be switched back on and it is switched back on not only for corruption but also for axing services to the poorest and most vulnerable members in our community, the frail aged. Terry White and Richard Ashby, the board chair and CEO of the Metropolitan South Hospital and Health Service have taken the opportunity to flick the green light against the Moreton Bay aged-care unit and, who would believe it, the entire Wynnum Hospital. Local community members could not believe their ears when they turned up at a public meeting to discuss the expansion of the emergency department at the local hospital only to be told—cruelly, callously and coldly—that the entire hospital is to be scrapped. This is community consultation under the LNP government. It was a community ambush. Shame on you! Members opposite should squirm in their seats. Does your local hospital board now have the green light to close aged-care beds? Well, let us wait for the screams to come.

I have been approached by family members of residents at Eventide who have explained to me their fears about the impact of these poorly planned bed closures on residents directly affected and on the broader community of residents. Mrs Waite asked me to attend the public meeting because she was fearful that any attempt to move her mother would have dire consequences. She was frightened that just the uncertainty of these proposed changes had worsened her mother's already precarious health. I also met with patients in wheelchairs with advanced MS and muscular dystrophy. These residents were equally fearful that closures of the facilities may be the beginning of the closure of the entire Eventide campus at Brighton.

For many residents, we must remember, and the LNP must remember, this is their last home. They know that they have lived a long life. They have raised their families and contributed to their communities. They know their lives are coming to an end. They know that their family visit them and they love them. Some residents are able to respond to family and friends, but others simply cannot. They are loved and cared for by not only their families but also the workers at Eventide. What sort of society are we when we cannot let our frail and elderly citizens live out their remaining days in peace and some degree of comfort? LNP government, shame, shame, shame on every one of you!