



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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HOUSING BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (5.34 p.m.): I rise to add my strong support to the Housing Bill brought to the House by the Housing Minister, Robert Swarten. Before I speak in detail about the bill, I want to indicate my support for the minister in the successes that he has had year after year in increasing the state budget for public housing.

Mr Mickel: It went up by \$200 million under the minister.

Ms NOLAN: That is quite right. Robert Swarten has very much—

Mr Mickel: In the face of a \$300 million federal cutback.

Ms NOLAN: In the face of a \$300 million federal cutback, he has consistently increased the state government's contribution to public housing. In a tight fiscal environment, that is a real achievement and a sign of a minister who is doing a good job.

The minister has often fought a lonely battle to put housing issues on the national political agenda. We hear him in here, sitting week after sitting week, raising these issues. We see the press releases that he puts out and we know about the pressure that he puts on the federal government. However, sadly and for reasons which defy me, there is a complete ignorance of these issues in the federal political arena. These issues will come and bite this community in a very big way. This minister will be able to say that he told us so. It is hardly the kind of victory that we in politics seek to achieve. At the end of the day, being able to say 'I told you so' is not what we are after, but that is what is going to happen.

Before I go on, I also very much want to commend the Director-General of Housing, Linda Apelt. She is a fantastic achiever and a very good female director-general. I might even suggest that there could be a few more female D-Gs to contribute in such a positive way.

Members are well aware that housing, particularly public housing, is an issue that is very close to my heart. I have informed the House before that my mother grew up in public housing in Warwick. After her father left, her mother, my grandmother, was left to bring up three kids on her own with a measly state pension and the bit of money that she could get together through sewing and cleaning for the more well-to-do folk of Warwick. I have told the House before that my mother and her two brothers have all gone on to be big achievers in society. One of my mother's brothers is the CEO of one of Australia's top 100 companies. There is no doubt that those three children, as they were, would not have had the opportunity to live in a stable environment, to get a good education and to stick together as a family if it was not for the security that public housing provided them with. Public housing continues to provide people all over Queensland and, indeed, all over Australia with that security in life every day of every year.

I firmly believe that affordable housing is a sleeper issue of the future. Within a year or two, it will become very prominent all over Queensland and most certainly in the community of Ipswich. Right now in Ipswich emergency housing is in an absolute crisis. The few emergency housing providers that we have—the Ipswich community rent scheme, the Booval community service and others—find themselves turning away people who are desperately in need of a place to stay on an almost daily basis. Most people end up crashing on the floor at a friend's place, sleeping in the car or traipsing around from local member to local member, housing agency to housing agency, day after day, week after week trying to find themselves a secure place to sleep.

The reason that emergency housing is in absolute crisis is that there is not enough federal funding for it. When people get into an emergency house, they have to stay there. There is not enough public housing to move into and, in particular, the tenancy databases—which I am very proud to have been a part of addressing—have kept a huge number of people out of private rentals. People struggle and struggle to get out of desperate situations, often domestic violence situations, and into emergency housing. When they get in, there is nowhere for them to go. Those people keep out other people in situations just like them. The situation is desperate in Ipswich, as I am sure it is in other communities around the state.

Mr Mickel: It certainly is in Logan.

Ms NOLAN: I note the interjection of the member for Logan. There is a need for more funding for emergency housing. Perhaps more importantly, there is a need to address the structural issues that keep people out of the private and public rental markets and that give people who need emergency housing a decent, secure, long-term place to go.

Sadly, over a long period in Australia the federal government has turned its back on public housing. Instead, for purely ideological reasons, it has chosen to put its money into rent assistance. But rent assistance is not any good to people in a market where rents are extremely high and increasing. It is no good to those kept out of the market by the tenancy database. It is no use to Aboriginals, single mothers with three kids, people who have a dog, people who look a bit scruffy or others who, for whatever reason, every time they walk into a real estate agent are told, 'Sorry. We haven't got a thing available.' The private rental market, even with rent assistance, will not begin to house everybody, and that is very much an issue that the government needs to address.

Recently in the federal press we have seen some hoo-ha about the increased costs of housing, particularly in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. I have been very saddened to see the Howard government acting as though this whole issue can be attributed to state stamp duty. Sadly, this economic illiteracy was perpetuated by Mr Hopper today.

Mr Mickel: He thinks hundreds and thousands are things you put on cakes.

Ms NOLAN: Stamp duty is not the issue when it comes to affordable housing. What we are seeing in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane is that market forces are driving up the cost of housing. Stamp duty is the icing on the hundreds and thousands cake. Stamp duty is a small contributor; fundamental market forces are driving the price up. If we removed stamp duty, all we would do is fuel the growth in the housing market; prices would rise in proportion to the amount of stamp duty removed. That is how markets work. The idea that we could remove stamp duty in order to stimulate a housing market and that that would somehow fix the problem of a stimulated housing market does not make a huge amount of economic sense. However, that is the sort of rubbish we are seeing perpetuated by Mr Hopper and by the federal government today. It is economic craziness. It is blaming the states for a much broader market issue.

What we are seeing in the housing market is a fundamental market failure. The market does not provide housing for people on low incomes. The market does not look after people such as my mother's family, who did not have a lot of money and who needed a place to live. This is not an issue about stamp duty. This is about a fundamental failure of the market to take care of these people. That is where government needs to kick in. That is where this minister has been arguing for years that we need to kick in. This issue is occurring in Ipswich and in other places.

Mr Mickel: Logan.

Ms NOLAN: It is occurring in Logan and elsewhere.

Ms Keech: And in Albert.

Ms NOLAN: In recent years in Ipswich we have seen a housing boom, and it is driving poor people out of the city to places such as Lowood and Esk where there are no services and no public transport and people struggle to be connected to the community. That will continue to happen. I commend this minister for his ongoing fight to put these issues of affordable housing on our national agenda. It is very much a fight in which I support him.