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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Vietnamese Senior Citizens Group of Hume

SPEECH

Thursday, 27 February 2014

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Questioner
Speaker Vamvakinou, Maria, MP

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Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (11:56): Firstly, I would like to associate myself with the comments of the member for Brisbane, especially insofar as they relate to our former colleague the late Senator Jeannie Ferris. As an indication of how friendships can be formed amongst people from both sides of the fence in this place, Jeannie and I travelled together. In my first term, when I became the member for Calwell, both she and I were IPU delegates and I had the opportunity to get to know Jeannie very well and become good friends with her. She was a woman who was as beautiful as she was larger than life. Her battle with ovarian cancer touched many of us and she is missed, I am certain, by her family but also by all of us who had the opportunity to know her and to work with her.

Today I wish to speak about a celebration that I attended recently in my electorate, the Vietnamese Senior Citizens Group in Meadow Heights, who I join annually for their New Year celebrations. This year is of course the year of the horse. These celebrations are always a feast of cultural tradition and great food, and on that day I left with copious amounts of traditional Vietnamese cuisine, which I should say my son enjoyed thoroughly. I would like to talk about the Vietnamese community in my electorate. In particular I want to talk about the people in the community who work as volunteers to service and take care of the social needs of the community. As late as 2013 there were approximately 1,200 Australian citizens of Vietnamese background living in Calwell, and about 200 of those have reached the age of 60 and above. Most of them have been socially and economically disadvantaged and for years have been living in isolation or in self-imposed social exclusion, largely because of language barriers and cultural differences, and of course because of ill health. More so, for those who are elderly the loss of their partners has added to this isolation, and transport difficulties mean that they are not able to get around as easily as they want to.

In terms of language and social deficiencies, many of them rely on social activities that are put together for them—in this case, by the Vietnamese Senior Citizens Group. The Vietnamese Senior Citizens Group of Hume was founded in 1995, and its main purpose is to assist Vietnamese citizens, or Australians of Vietnamese background, to integrate into mainstream Australian society, while assisting them to maintain their cultural heritage. But, more importantly, the group exists in order to mitigate against social isolation or self-imposed social exclusion and, above all, to help people live a healthier and safe life. The group also works to inform citizens of their rights and obligations and to provide mutual support for them.

During the 18 years of the group's existence, it has assisted older Vietnamese Australians and has done a terrific job. In many cases it provides cultural and welfare support because often it is left having to deal with a lot of the difficulties. I want to commend the group for conducting over 300 social gatherings and 20 information sessions and providing 300 hours of assistance with matters that involve translation and interpreting services. They have conducted over 200 visits to members who are in stressful home situations and they support their members during times of grievance and at funerals. They even provide basic English classes and they run a wonderful physical education program which involves tai chi, walking and lots of other things that are of great use to the elderly in particular. Importantly for all of us who love eating, they have conducted 25 cooking lessons of Vietnamese traditional cuisine.

I want to thank president Danh Duc Tran and his wonderful wife, Gia, for their commitment, vice president Mr Lieu Van Nguyen, secretary Mr Duong Van Nguyen and treasurer Mr Cong Chinh Vu for the amazing work they do for the Vietnamese community.