



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

Nursing Homes: Care Standards

SPEECH

Monday, 6 August 2001

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Billson, Bruce, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (3.55 pm)—That was a wonderful, kind introduction from the member for Bass, and I thank her for drawing attention to my assiduous and tireless work in representing my constituency. The point that the member for Bass missed, and the point that my colleague highlighted, is that when the coalition government were elected, the Auditor-General identified a 10,000 bed shortfall and a half billion dollar shortfall in capital funding left to us by the former Labor government. The best the member for Bass can do is complain about the 30,000-plus beds that we have brought onstream since we were elected and the fact that these multimillion dollar facilities require considerable work to have them available and to a standard that provides for the dignity and the proper care of residents. They are not simply hospital beds, which is another point of confusion the member for Bass has identified. These are people's homes. If someone is assessed as needing this sort of accommodation, there is an obligation on all of us to play a constructive role and make sure that that level of care is there.

I am glad the member for Bass highlighted the work I am undertaking at a local level. We have been able to convince the various state and federal planning authorities that there is an urgent need for additional beds on the Mornington Peninsula. Again, the member for Bass's criticism is that we have actually been successful in attracting more than 400 new residential aged care beds to the Mornington Peninsula region. These are substantial facilities and, again, I thank the member for Bass for her kind praise and for drawing people's attention to the work I have been doing to assist with the early availability of those beds. There is a considerable need for aged care beds, and that is why the government has made more than 30,000 additional aged care beds available since it was elected—to make up for the 10,000 shortfall left to it, plus the growing population that my colleague Mr Andrews was speaking of earlier.

The good news—and this is something that the member for Bass might not be aware of—is that, in the most recent allocation of beds, the region that I represent is getting additional beds, again recognising the need of a growing population and the fact that the Mornington Peninsula is highly regarded as a retirement destination. People choose to retire in our area, and in some cases that retirement takes the form of residential aged care. In addition, we have the RSL Park facility in Frankston—and I am surprised the member for Bass did not talk about it, but I will come back to that in a moment.

We find in today's *Newcastle Herald* what this is really all about. The federal member for Shortland, Jill Hall, is just chasing headlines; nothing more than headlines. Where have the Labor Party been while we have had hard work to do to clean up the mess left behind in the aged care sector from 13 years of neglect from the former Labor government? They have been AWOL—absent without leadership. They had no idea how to fix the horrendous problem they left us with. The Gregory report, a report the former Labor government commissioned, identified a half billion dollar shortfall in capital funding, and what did the Labor government do in their final years? They cut capital funding by 75 per cent. That shows the sincerity with which the Labor Party addresses these issues, and that is probably why we have two recently elected members of the Labor Party talking about this subject: it is really helpful to stand up and seem sincere when you have got zero corporate knowledge about where we have come from. That is the only explanation that could be attributed to those earlier speakers. They must have no idea of the mess that was left to this government by the former Labor government in the area of aged care, and that is why they are here talking so sanctimoniously about aged care.

The member for Bass talks about the acute nature of the care needs of people going into nursing homes. This highlights another confusion in the Labor Party. If they need hospital care, Member for Bass, put them in a hospital. But again that highlights a problem that the aged care community is facing as successive Labor state governments around this country churn people through hospitals: as soon as there is half a chance to get them out of there, they whip them out and dump them on the aged care industry. The member for Bass should go and talk to providers faced with having to accommodate people coming out of hospital at such a rapid rate and who might need care for only a few days, when that is not the appropriate care they need. You should jump to your feet and apologise for those disgraceful remarks you made before.

Ms O'Byrne—I rise on a point of order on relevance, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is not in any way reflecting the aged care crisis and the people who need—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

Mr BILLSON—The member for Bass tries to not learn more about the aged care industry by burning up the time that is available to me. Let me again highlight another point that the Labor Party have a problem with: they run around the country saying that they are concerned about the quality of aged care. But, when some action is taken to ensure that the quality of aged care services available to residents is enforced, what do they do? They run around saying, 'Gee, this is all too hard. How can you be so cruel?' They did that: the Labor Party did that in Dunkley when the RSL war veterans park was identified as needing some additional assistance. In Riverside, when its problems were identified years ago, they did nothing. They are a hypocritical bunch. *(Time expired)*

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.