



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Aged Care Reform

SPEECH

Monday, 21 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Neumann, Shayne, MP

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Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (19:40): This aged-care reform package is extremely important not only for electorates in other states but also for nursing homes in my electorate, such as Blue Care Brassall Aged Care Facility, Blue Care Lauriston Aged Care Facility, Blue Care Nowlanvil Aged Care Facility, Colthup Home, RSL Milford Grange and the like. Dean Phelan, the CEO of Church of Christ Care in Queensland, commented in relation to the aged-care difficulties and challenges we face—and we know that from the third *Intergenerational report*, which said that we will have 2.7 Australians working for every person over 65 years of age in 2050. He said:

At the moment, across Australia, too few people are able to access care and support in their own home when they want it. There are also not enough nursing homes being built and employers are having trouble recruiting and keeping aged care workers. Many older Australians have to conduct a fire-sale of their home to pay exorbitantly high bonds to some providers to get into needed residential care.

I could not have put it better—and that is exactly what the Productivity Commission found in its report. That is why this federal Labor government responded with a package that shows that it is fair dinkum about aged-care reform. The sector has also responded positively, as can be seen in the comments by Dean Phelan in his most recent report in relation to this.

What we are doing here is allowing more people to stay in their home through more home care packages—massively increasing that—and helping carers get access to the kinds of respite and other supports needed. There is also a particular package in relation to dementia, which I think is groundbreaking. We know how important that is. We are strengthening the aged-care workforce. I know that the Australian Nursing Federation has been strong in that regard. Aged-care workers, particularly nurses, are paid on average \$300 less than those who work in the public sector. We are also providing a new gateway agency, a one-stop shop, to help older Australians and their families navigate the difficulties of a fragmented and underfunded system of the past.

We have massively increased the funding in the aged-care sector. It is bit rich to be lectured by those opposite, who had seven aged-care ministers in 10 years and one of them famously said he did not like older people. So it is really quite extraordinary that those opposite should lecture us in relation to aged care. This is a package that will make a difference. It will provide additional assistance. There are a million Australians who access the HACC system and about 170,000 people are in residential aged care, but two-thirds of our aged-care budget is actually geared towards those 170,000 people—not the million people who want to stay in their homes with packages like the EACH package and the EACH dementia type packages. What we want to do is give people greater choice and greater options for their retirement.

I think the current system, which has been a problem for quite a considerable period of time, is something that Joseph Stalin in the 1930s would have been very happy with, as it is so centralised. Aged-care providers have for a long time told me that not enough money has been put into it. We have increased funding significantly, and this particular package in this budget adds to it. We are talking about some \$44 billion across the forward estimates that we have put into aged care—far more than any other government has ever provided.

We want to make sure that older people are not forced to sell their family home to pay bonds. It is quite variable. Fortunately in my area it is not the case that we see large bonds having to be paid, but certainly it is a challenge for people. I know when I go to places like Nowlanvil and other aged-care facilities around Blair, particularly around Ipswich, there are a lot of older people going in much older. I recall when I was a boy, and my grandmother was the matron of Colthup Home, that people in their fifties would go into aged-care facilities. Now the average age is 84 years old. They are going into high care.

This sector has had problems for a long time. I spent 14 years on the board of Queensland Baptist Care so I know a bit about this sector. My family has been involved in aged-care provision in Ipswich for three generations. I think that what we need to do is have a good look at the sector. We really need to put serious money in. We are

going to make the legislative changes and the administrative reforms and we are going to put extra money in. This budget is a down payment, in my view, as we really care for older people and give them greater choice and greater control over their lives, improving the quality of aged care in this country.

I am very pleased to see the money put in to tackle dementia. I think it is such an important place. If you go into dementia wards, particularly in nursing homes, you can see the challenges that are there for all of us. (*Time expired*)