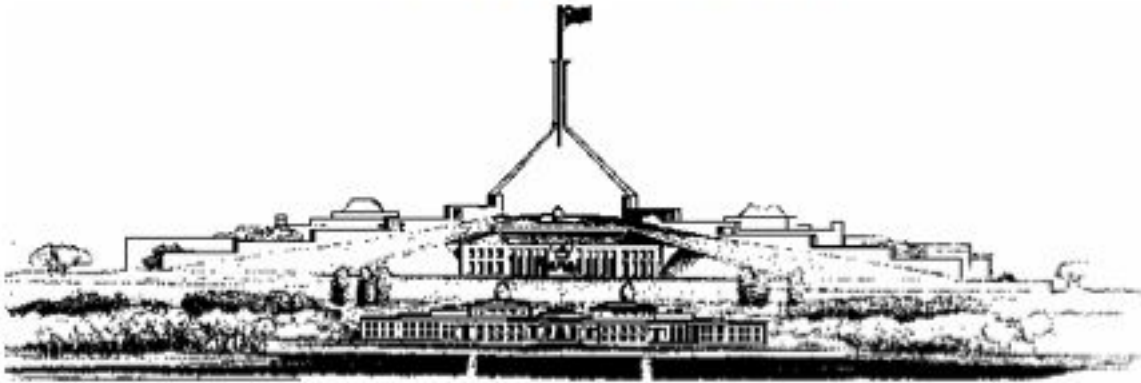




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Royal Commission into Aged
Care Quality and Safety**

SPEECH

Monday, 15 October 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 15 October 2018
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Questioner
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (10:24): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Government is asking the Governor-General to establish a Royal Commission into the Aged Care Sector;

(b) this Royal Commission will primarily look at the quality of care provided in residential and home aged care to senior Australians, but also include young Australians with disabilities living in residential aged care settings, as well as the challenges associated with the provision of aged care in remote, rural and regional Australia;

(c) evidence to date shows that the problems are not restricted to any one part of the aged care sector, whether it is for profit or not for profit, large or small facilities, or regional or major metropolitan; and

(d) the Royal Commission will look at the sector as a whole, without bias or prejudice, and make findings on the evidence;

(2) commends the Government for taking action to ensure that older Australians have access to care that supports their dignity and recognises the contribution that they have made to society; and

(3) calls on the Government to continue to provide record level funding to the aged care sector.

I am indeed delighted to put my name to this motion and commend the government for its decisive action in calling a royal commission into aged care, the key objective of which is to help build a national culture of respect for ageing and older Australians. I welcome the broad terms of reference announced just last week.

After learning of the abuses at Oakden and receiving recommendations of the review that followed, the government acted swiftly to improve regulation and to impose a new audit regime on the sector. The introduction of unannounced audits and accreditation visits has seen a substantial increase in the number of identified incidents over the past year, including a 177 per cent increase in reported serious risks and a 185 per cent increase in notices of noncompliance.

Yet, despite the significance of recent data that highlights serious issues, there is still strong evidence that Australia provides some of the best aged care in the world, and we should never lose sight of that fact. The Australian community has every right to expect only the highest standards when it comes to aged-care services that support the dignity of older Australians and the peace of mind of loved ones. Not only does the Australian government share these expectations but, as a government—and, I'm sure, as a parliament—we are determined that these expectations are met to ensure there are no exceptions.

The Prime Minister's announcement of a royal commission has a special significance for me as the member for Fairfax. This is because the Sunshine Coast region, where I share the local government area with the member for Fisher, has one of the highest concentrations of older Australians anywhere in the country. At the last census, 20.9 per cent of the Sunshine Coast population was over 65 years of age, compared to just 15.2 per cent for Queensland and 15.8 per cent for the entire country. It should therefore come as no surprise that I have a keen interest in the welfare of older Australians, with whom I meet regularly, as I do with their families and aged-care providers across my electorate.

I also meet regularly with the Fairfax Seniors Advisory Committee that I established soon after being elected, and we host a Fairfax Seniors Forum each year. The message from these groups is that while good progress on improving aged-care services has indeed been made, more remains to be done. Older Australians demand to be

heard, and by hosting a series of community workshops later this month I intend to amplify the voices of my constituents to help inform the royal commission on the local situation. The message from the Sunshine Coast is loud and clear: they want firm action to identify and weed out substandard care wherever it is found. That is what this royal commission is all about, and this government should be commended for seeking to complement recent reforms with such a powerful response.

However, it's not enough simply to shine a bright light on the problems; real action must follow. Such action is not only a matter of legislative will but also of financial will, and that is the Liberal-National coalition's strong suit. As is also the case with nation-building infrastructure, when it comes to supporting older Australians the coalition actually puts money on the table. Today, under this minister, funding for aged care is at record levels and is expected to grow from \$18.6 billion last financial year to \$23.6 billion over the next five years.

This will improve the lives of older Australians and, thanks to the coalition's strong economic management, we can sustain the high-level services that older Australians expect and which they rightly deserve.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mrs Marino: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.