




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GAVEN

Record of Proceedings, 30 October 2018

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Aged Care

 **Ms SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (2.10 pm): I believe that a nation should be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable. I spoke in my first speech about Barry, a constituent and pensioner in my electorate who told me that he had to shop around for the cheapest haircut because he was struggling to make ends meet. This is not an uncommon story I hear from many people who have worked all of their lives or women who have raised their children and volunteered in our community because they grew up in a time where it was unacceptable to earn a wage themselves.

My office always assists these pensioners to take advantage of all of the concessions and rebates offered by the Palaszczuk government, but I often hear complaints about how long the wait is to get through to Centrelink to discuss a problem or even to apply for a pension. Last week I was shocked to hear during a Senate estimates hearing in Canberra that almost 48 million Centrelink calls went unanswered during the last financial year. It is simply unacceptable that seniors are barely surviving as they wait months to have their aged pension application considered by the Department of Human Services due to insufficient staffing. Seniors and pensioners deserve better than the cuts to services and the privatisation by stealth we are seeing from the federal government and local workers deserve better than being sacked so that their jobs can be outsourced to private contractors.

We all saw the heartbreaking *Four Corners* expose on our aged-care sector and I think it is fair to say that what we are seeing is a national disgrace in this sector. I recently visited two Gold Coast aged-care facilities to thank the staff there who work incredibly hard and do overtime work because they are passionate about their job and the people they care for. They deserve to be thanked and not torn down by a Prime Minister who said that a 60-year-old aged-care worker should aspire to get a better job. What struck me most during my visit was how tired, overworked and unappreciated the staff felt. Many said that the staffing levels were unsafe, forcing residents to wait longer than they should for help. They also talked about the insufficient amount of time they had to properly clean and feed residents and that essential items like incontinence pads were being rationed. I heard from Allison, who has been working in the sector for over 10 years and is paid only \$24 an hour.

These stories are hauntingly similar to the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union's statewide audit of aged-care facilities report, which revealed chronic understaffing and associated elder neglect. All 83 facilities audited failed to provide the recommended 4.3 hours of care per resident per day as outlined by research commissioned by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. The worst electorate in the state was the federal seat of Moncrieff, which includes the Gold Coast suburbs of Nerang and Carrara in my electorate, with an average of only 1.69 hours of care per resident per day. Despite these horrifying audit results, the federal government has failed to introduce a national safe staffing law to protect the hundreds of thousands of elderly Australians in care. To be fair, I will acknowledge that the federal government has finally called for a royal commission into the aged-care sector—and I know that many people in my community will be watching with interest—but what I do not

understand is why actions are not being taken right now. How many of our parents and grandparents need to endure these appalling circumstances before we make any meaningful change that will provide our loved ones with the dignity and respect they deserve?

We know that we have an ageing population. Everyone is working hard to pay bills and put food on the table and it is not always possible for family members to provide the level of care that is required. When I was in primary school my own grandmother was diagnosed with dementia. Her three sons and daughter tried to provide additional care. However, this became increasingly difficult as her capacity started to diminish. My family, like many other Australian families, trusted and relied on aged-care facilities to be there when we could not. I have heard from those who have watched their loved ones suffer and it is an issue that touches every Queenslander. We should not be at a point where constituents are telling me that they would rather take their own life than live in an aged-care facility. Our parents and grandparents deserve better. Care for our elder Queenslanders must be a priority and it is time that we show courage and leadership and confront an issue that has been avoided for too long.