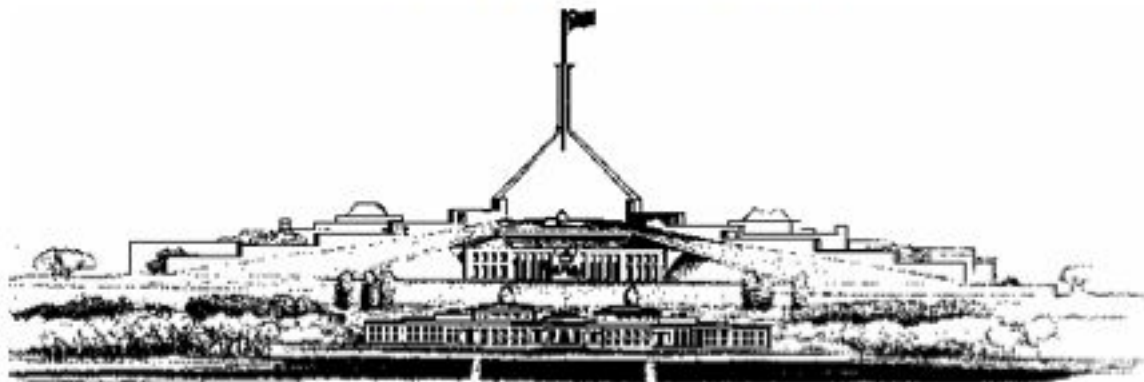




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill  
2013, Australian Aged Care Quality Agency  
Bill 2013, Australian Aged Care Quality Agency  
(Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013, Aged Care  
(Bond Security) Amendment Bill 2013, Aged  
Care (Bond Security) Levy Amendment Bill 2013**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 26 June 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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# SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 26 June 2013  
**Page** 7  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** McKenzie, Sen Bridget

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria) (10:10): I rise to make a shortened contribution to this debate on what could have been a significant opportunity for this government to deal with the real issues across the aged-care system. This focus-group-tested and press-release-happy-titled Living Longer Living Better aged-care reform package, announced on 20 April, is a package of five bills to give effect to the government's response to the Productivity Commission's report into caring for older Australians.

A lot of comments have been made about rural and regional issues related to the provision of aged-care services, because there are some real concerns about the impact of this package on those services, on the people who use them and on the communities that support them. In regional Australia there are 1,225 residential aged-care providers, 1,100 of which have 60 or fewer beds, the number of beds being a figure that is generally used to define how viable a provider will be. In the Bendigo electorate, where my office is situated, over 17 per cent of the population is 65 years of age or older, which is above the average in my home state of Victoria. As is the case in other regional areas, available residential and home care services for the elderly are at below average levels. As Senator Fierravanti-Wells has already mentioned, ageing in place is incredibly important for those who live in regional areas, because it is not only about the individual's wellbeing but also about the stability of community and the cohesiveness of our families.

Again, this package of bills contained no detail. Providers and stakeholders were asked to comment on how the bills would affect them and the work that they do without being provided with any detail. Rural providers, throughout the brief consultation we were able to conduct into this package of bills, raised several challenges, including the relatively high cost of establishing and delivering services in rural areas; difficulties in attracting, retaining and professionally developing suitably qualified staff; the limited availability of medical practitioners; low-income asset value; distance; logistics of continuous care provision; and so on.

I believe this package of bills fails to address the challenges faced by our rural providers. The early provisions which can potentially come into force on Monday next week will actually set the standards in

efficiency within the Public Service. Good luck with that coming into effect! What we on our side know is that this is not about aged-care services; it is about buying votes.

I participated in the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry. We travelled across the country in a very brief period of time. It is regrettable that sufficient time to consider this important legislation was further eroded by the majority of Labor and Greens senators, who voted to bring forward the reporting date of this committee from 17 June to 31 May. As I said, stakeholders have had limited time and the devil is always in the detail.

Reform is required, and the majority of the sector actually supported the Productivity Commission's report, yet here we are with a grab bag of legislation that really only adopts less than 10 per cent of what the Productivity Commission sought to recommend. Obviously, though, the coalition as the champions of rural and regional Australia have made significant recommendations for how this package of bills could be made better for rural and regional areas, and that is outlined in our dissenting report.

But this government continues the rush to legislate without detail. The amendments moved by the coalition, by the Greens and by Senator Xenophon deserve greater scrutiny. We should be going into committee to do that, but—as usual—we are disrespected as senators. (*Time expired*)

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT ( Senator Marshall ): Order! The time allotted for consideration of these bills has now expired. The question is that these bills be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a second time.