



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Defence Force

SPEECH

Monday, 14 July 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 14 July 2014 Page 144 Questioner Speaker Brodtmann, Gai, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11:50): As mentioned by the member for Bruce, in reading this motion his initial thought, and mine, was that the member for Brisbane was actually asking the House to congratulate the previous Labor government for its commitment to supporting the men and women of the ADF—congratulations that would be well deserved. The first item concerns free basic health care. As I said at the time of the announcement by the government on 31 January, I welcome the Abbott government's decision to proceed with Labor's National Australian Defence Force Family Health Program, which provides free basic medical services for Defence families. I thank the member for Brisbane for giving me the opportunity to do so again.

In April last year, Labor committed to the national rollout of this program after a four-year trial in regional locations found it to be incredibly effective. Under the program, all dependants of permanent ADF members and reservists on continuous full-time service will be eligible to receive full reimbursement for their medical out-of-pocket expenses when visiting a general practice, and up to \$400 each year per dependant towards allied health and specialist services.

Under the Abbott government's new, unfair Medicare co-payment, the Medicare rebate is reduced by \$5 for all GP services, which appears to suggest that ADF family program beneficiaries are likely to be affected. If the beneficiary is bulk-billed, a \$7 patient co-payment will be imposed, again affecting ADF personnel and their families. The government must clarify whether or not Defence families will be worse off because of its unfair Medicare co-payment.

I also read that the member for Brisbane asks the House to applaud the government for 'officially launching' the Suakin project on 26 November last year. The member for Brisbane would of course be aware that Plan Suakin was an initiative of the previous Labor government and indeed was originally launched in August 2011 by my energetic colleague the member for Batman. As the member pointed out at the time of the second 'official launch', this plan had been on the Defence website for over a year and was referenced in the Defence white paper published in 2013.

While the member for Brisbane is quick to applaud these initiatives, which I welcome, of the previous Labor government, she conveniently makes no mention of the retrograde steps that have been taken by the Abbott government over the last 10 months—for example, the ideological decision to conduct a privatisation scoping study on Defence Housing Australia. I say 'ideological' because the government has so far not been able to come up with any evidence or explanation as to why privatisation should be pursued or that there is a case that it would improve the effectiveness of provision of housing to ADF personnel. In fact, at a Senate estimates hearing on 26 June, the Minister for Defence said Defence Housing Australia is—to quote him—'well run'. Why is the government insisting on a disruptive process to consider the privatisation of a business that is well run, according to the Minister for Defence, knowing that it is creating uncertainty among ADF personnel and their families?

The member for Brisbane also ignores the deferral of phase 3 of the Single LEAP, or Living Environment and Accommodation Precinct, project. Single LEAP is a multiphase project that was to have provided 4,410 accommodation units and supporting infrastructure at 20 sites across 17 ADF bases. Single LEAP phases 1 and 2 were delivered under the former Labor government, significantly improving accommodation for single personnel. The deferral of phase 3 is an unnecessary setback for our serving men and women.

The member for Brisbane also conveniently omits mention of the Abbott government's decision to cut the indexation of veterans' pensions to CPI only. The member for Brisbane also omits to mention the axing of the three months backdating of veterans' disability pensions for successful claimants and the scrapping of the seniors supplement for 29,000 war veterans.

Just this morning I was going through the Vietnam veterans peacekeepers and peacemakers journal, running through page 4, the bad news. It mentions a range of things—a slap in the face for veterans, pensions under attack,

service pension concessions under attack, backdating of pension claims scrapped, the \$211 a year income support payment to children of a dead or injured parent with overseas service axed, DVA offices closing in regional areas and veterans being sent to Centrelink, senior supplements scrapped, military super to be counted as income, and phonebook cuts. These are just some of the areas that Vietnam veterans and other vets are very concerned about.

In closing, the member for Brisbane also completely ignores the disappointing performance of the Abbott government in failing the Australian shipbuilding industry. (*Time expired*)