



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
PROOF
STATEMENTS BY SENATORS
Budget
SPEECH

Wednesday, 13 May 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 13 May 2015 Page 44 Questioner Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (13:33): I want this budget to succeed. I want confidence to return to consumers and the small business sector. I want more jobs created and I want job security to return to those Australians who are lucky enough to have employment. However, the 2015-2016 Prime Minister and Treasurer's budget is an attempt to repair the great social and economic harm which was unnecessarily caused by the Prime Minister and Treasurer's budget of 2014-15. With this budget, the arsonist who burnt down the house in 2014-15 has now returned with some flowers and chocolates—and an application for a builder's licence.

So, like most matters in politics, it now comes down to a matter of trust. With this budget, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have proven that they misled us about a budget emergency a year ago. With this budget, the narrative that a hung parliament will guarantee chaos and will be bad for Australia has also been exposed as a lie. A hung parliament with sensible, responsible, caring independents on the crossbench has been proven to guarantee consultation and has been good for Australia. A hung parliament with sensible, responsible, caring independents on the crossbench has been proven to be an insurance policy against the excesses of all of the major political parties. A hung parliament has tempered and remedied: (1) the Liberals greed and born-to-rule arrogance; (2) the Nationals lack of courage to stand up to the Liberals and stand up for the bush; (3) the Greens extreme environmental zealotry; and (4) Labor's uncontrollable desire to please the Greens at the expense of workers' jobs. And, I dare say, the better hung—the more well-hung—the parliament, the better the protection that pensioners, families, unemployed and the battlers will have against the excesses, incompetency and dishonesty of the Liberals, the ALP and the Greens.

There are many serious political commentators who specialise in economics who warn that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, in a selfish attempt of political self-preservation, have avoided the hard economic decisions to return our budget to a surplus. Indeed, the Australian *Financial Review* says that the government's plan to return the budget to surplus is barely credible. My grandchildren may have a government which has lost its triple-A credit rating thanks to the Prime Minister and the Treasurer's lack of courage. This budget has missed opportunities to raise new revenue and save money. We do not have to continue this attack on pensioners and families. We could bring our troops home from the Middle East and save \$750 million a year or \$3 billion over the forward estimates. It is dumb to risk our diggers lives in Iraq when the US has made a half-hearted commitment of 3,000 troops in the recognition that it is a lost cause in Iraq now.

And even if the Prime Minister refuses to bring the troops home, why do Australian pensioners and families have to pay \$750 million a year for our troops to be in the Middle East. Why can't the countries and peoples who want our military presence in the Middle East pay us, compensate us, for our costs? Those countries and peoples, even though it may not look like it on TV, are making large surpluses. *The Economist* magazine published a pocketbook for 2015 which summarises and compares the financial state of all the countries in the world. Page 34 shows that five rich Middle Eastern oil countries, out of the top 17 countries, have recorded some of the largest surpluses in the world, with a combined total of nearly USD \$400 million, or AUD \$459 million. The surpluses include, in US dollars: Saudi Arabia, \$164.48 billion; Kuwait, US\$76.28 billion; United Arab Emirates, \$66.58 billion, Qatar, \$626 billion and Iraq, \$29.58 billion, giving a total surplus of USD \$398.6 billion. If those Middle Eastern countries financially benefit from Australia's military presence in the Middle East then they should pay for our diggers' presence. It is time the Prime Minister gave a guarantee that ordinary Australians—veterans, students, pensioners, families and the unemployed—will not be made to pay more in tax or lose entitlements in order to fund the latest futile war in the Middle East against Islamic extremists.

We need those troops at home to protect us, because while you will hear that there is a large boost to the resourcing of the Australian Federal Police, what you do not hear is that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have plans in this budget to slash the number of federal police by 115. Other vital public service jobs that will cop the axe are 17 officers and workers from the Australian Crime Commission; 400 Australian Defence Force Reserves; and 41 officers from the Department of Veterans Affairs, all of this while our veterans' suicide rates are at obscene levels.

While I am talking about the Australian Federal Police I would like to congratulate them on the magnificent job they are doing to protect us not only from drug smugglers and the white powdered death they peddle to our children—eight Tasmanians a year die from opiate related drugs—but also from the Islamic fanatics, traitors and terrorists who want all Australians to eat halal food and live under sharia law. I have held a number of meetings with the AFP and other public service officers who are investigating the death threats against me, and I have found them to be some of the most dedicated and professional public servants.

In relation to those death threats, AFP officers made me aware of the fact that they believe that the person or group who made the threat have also made similar threats against other people in a number of different states. Obviously I will not be disclosing any other details of the AFP's investigations. When the death threat was mailed to me some critics insinuated it was made up and not genuine. Those critics are wrong and once again involved in nasty personal attacks, which I will not tolerate.

Once again I am calling on the Prime Minister to sack Veterans' Affairs Minister Michael Ronaldson and support a call for a royal commission into the management of veterans' issues. I recently released another YouTube short film featuring a wounded young veteran, Michael Lyddiard. Michael shared his story at a function that raised funds for young veterans to undertake a Kokoda trek as part of their ongoing rehabilitation. While I have seen the many injustices that different Australian governments have caused our veterans, it still shocked me that someone who had been as badly wounded as Michael was still being forced into a fight with a department led by Minister Michael Ronaldson. It is a national disgrace that, unfortunately, is being repeated thousands of times every year.

The average Australian would be forgiven for not realizing that in the past 15 years nearly 70,000 young veterans have served in war-like or war conditions in East Timor and the Middle East. Many veterans also say that after being discharged from the Australian Defence Force they have suffered more harm at the hands of our government than they suffered because of enemy action. I know that many former diggers are carrying injuries, both physical and psychological, that have not received the medical treatment they need to properly recover, or have been denied fair compensation by uncaring governments.

Only a royal commission will have the powers and capacity to uncover the truth surrounding the lethal dysfunction and under-resourcing in the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Only a royal commission will uncover the true level of harm and suicides experienced in the veterans' community. And only a royal commission will make recommendations that will provide a remedy for the growing veterans' affairs crisis.

In closing, I want to thank the defence minister for meeting with me for an hour at the beginning of this week. I raised with him a broad range of issues, one of which is the concern of our veterans that if those diggers who have served for 20 years or more and are covered by a number of different government compensation acts—the VEA, the MERCA and the SERCA—and who are currently serving overseas in the Middle East, are injured, they will receive less compensation than those diggers who have served less time and are only covered by one government injury compensation act. It is a complicated compensation and insurance issue that must be addressed and fixed. I call on the defence minister to make public his investigations into this matter.