



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

ADJOURNMENT

Australian Defence Force, Veterans

SPEECH

Tuesday, 28 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 28 October 2014 Page 8047 Questioner Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (22:30): I rise to bring to the attention of the Australian parliament a petition at the change.org website titled: 'Don't send our defence forces to war on a pay cut! Show our ADF the respect it deserves.' There are more than 19,000 electronic signatures on this petition, including my own. I have now placed that petition on my Facebook page and website, and I encourage every Tasmanian and Australian to visit and register their electronic signatures.

I would like every Australian who can operate a computer or smartphone to show solidarity with members of our Defence forces and their families as they face the very real prospect of being forced to endure a cut to their pay and conditions. The petition, posted by Tony Dagger from Sydney, Australia, sums up the situation very powerfully and succinctly:

The government have announced that they propose to give the ADF a pay offer for the next three years that doesn't even meet inflation. That means in real terms—it's a pay cut!

The offer is currently 1.5% for the next 3 years, and they're asking ADF members to give up 6 days leave to pay for even that! It's an absolute insult.

My son's in the RAAF, and with all of the things happening in the world right now, **life for defence force families is starting to get very tense again.** The idea that the government would not only offer a measly 1.5% increase to their pay right now, but also try and cut leave, giving them less time with their family, is outrageous.

The remuneration for our ADF personnel should reflect the value and respect we as a Nation have for anyone who is prepared in whatever capacity to put themselves and their own wellbeing and safety second to serving their country to make it a safe and better place for all of us to live in.

Offering a pit tance with an excuse of "current economic times" is disgusting and an insult to these brave men and women.

We need to ensure that our Defence Forces are remunerated at a level that reflects their importance and respect we as a country and community have for them.

Please sign this petition and your support will be forwarded to the Federal Government Ministers responsible.

In defence of the senior officers and government ministers who are in charge of Australia's military, I would like to say to this parliament that this mean and insulting pay offer to members of our Army, Navy and RAAF is an act which is out of character for those responsible and that somehow it is an uncharacteristic stuff-up from a group of competent, honourable people who have a distinguished management record. However, I am sad to say, for the ordinary diggers, sailors and airmen and women—and their families—I cannot say that truthfully.

This despicable wage offer is just one bastard act in a long list of bastard acts carried out by senior ADF officers who have lost the respect of their troops as they have fallen over themselves to forward their own careers at the expense of their mates while they suck up to two of the most incompetent and uncaring Defence and veterans' affairs ministers that Australia has ever seen in history. I am sickened by the performance of the senior officers in charge of our ADF. They are smug, self-serving, gutless individuals who have dishonoured their own uniform. If they had any honour they would resign from their positions rather than be part of the Liberal-National government's plan to take leave, entitlements and, effectively, money out of the pockets of their own troops.

Shame, Binskin! Shame, Griggs! Shame, Morrison! Your years of service will be rightly tainted and stained by your compliance with a despicable government wage offer to people you are supposed to support and protect at all times. How dare you present yourselves before this parliament and in public and allow yourselves and,

worse still, your uniforms and high positions in our ADF to be the mouthpieces and apologists for despicable and incompetent politicians whose actions prove they do not know the meaning of service, trust, loyalty and honour.

If the government have their way and their wage offer of 1.5 per cent for the next three years and loss of six days leave remains, then I am going to start a public campaign which will call on all Australians to turn their backs on any government minister or backbencher who decides to give a speech and presentation on Anzac Day for the centenary next year. If Liberal or National party members think that they can be part of a government which takes money and conditions away from members of our military and not feel any political pain then they have got another think coming. Every chance I get I will be urging Australian citizens who want to help our Defence Force members receive a fair pay offer to shun and turn their backs on government ministers and backbenchers who try to deliver speeches, especially on Anzac Day for the centenary.

I turn now to the cover-up of veteran suicide rates. Why have successive Liberal and Labor federal governments made it so hard for the widows and dependents of veterans who take their own lives to make a claim for compensation? The Abbott government was forced to admit recently that in the past 14 years since 2000 only 13 official compensation payments were made to the dependents of veterans who committed suicide.

Sadly, everyone in the ex-service community knows that, since 2000, hundreds of veterans who saw active service in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan have committed suicide. So how have senior military officers, politicians and Commonwealth public servants been able to escape being held to account for this national disgrace? Our senior military officers and government bureaucrats know that Australia has never had enough troops and military resources to safely carry out the orders given to them by our politicians.

All public service and military leadership know that, in the last 15 years, a relatively small number of combat troops were expected to carry a massive active service workload and that the present veteran suicide crisis is a direct result of military leadership silence and compliance with orders from politicians who overcommitted our underresourced Defence Force to foreign wars. Why else would the top brass and politicians allow our soldiers to have their active service deployments increased from six to eight months; complete up to 13 tours of active duty in just over a decade; and go on armed, combat patrols while officially receiving antipsychotic medication?

The reason all political parties, senior military and government bureaucrats want to cover up veteran suicide rate is that it is damning proof of their incompetence and failure to stand up for our diggers. Today, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Senator Ronaldson, rose in this place and talked about mental health, trying to give the impression he cares about veterans living with mental health illnesses.

I almost bought what he was selling—the deep voice, the measured delivery. I have to admire the minister: he has almost mastered the art of faking sincerity. But he and I both know that he does not care one little bit about people with mental disabilities. After suffering from mental illness in the past, brought on because of a vicious battle with the Department of Veterans' Affairs—as has been the case for many former members of the ADF—I have tried to show respect, care and consideration to people who live with mental disabilities. Indeed, I have tried to employ people who are living with forms of mental disabilities so that I could create a workplace with diversity and that is free from discrimination.

This government, through Minister Ronaldson and the Prime Minister, despite a wonderful antidiscrimination policy, have gone out of their way to prevent me from employing people with disabilities. They have placed unreasonable work conditions and travel restrictions on the people whom I chose to work with me.

One prospective employee was a commando—that is right—who served his time for our country, had his head almost blown off in battle and suffered immense brain damage. The government refused to accommodate his modest travel and living requests so that he could continue serving his country in a different form.

Another is a nationally acclaimed whistleblower, who has risked her career to save the lives of thousands of Australians and, in so doing, has suffered terribly. Once again, this government and this vindictive minister have refused to accommodate her reasonable travel requests, which would save the government \$5,000 a year. I am putting this minister and government on notice.

Mr President, I will not accept any more of the Prime Minister's or the Minister for Veterans' Affairs spiteful, illegal and discriminatory attitude towards people with mental illness or other disabilities. I look forward during

this week to detailing to the chamber the appalling discriminatory behaviour of Minister Ronaldson and Prime Minister Abbott, whose actions contradict their worthless and insincere words in this chamber.