



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Defence Force

QUESTION

Tuesday, 18 November 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

QUESTION

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Questioner Lambie, Sen Jacqui
Speaker

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Australian Defence Force

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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:49): My question without notice is to the minister representing the Minister for Defence. I refer the minister to his government's disgusting pay offer to the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, which targets them with an effective pay cut and strips them of Christmas holidays and leave while it steals thousands of dollars worth of entitlements. I also refer the minister to pictures of the Prime Minister in the media, using members of our military as extras in a Liberal Party publicity stunt. Can the minister detail why the government cannot afford an extra \$121 million to ensure a fair pay offer to our Australian Defence Force personnel?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:50): Thank you, Senator Lambie, for your question. It is an important question and, if I may say so, I have a very great deal of respect for the sincerity you bring to this issue as a former servicewoman yourself.

The answer to your question why the government cannot afford to be as generous as it would wish to be is because we inherited public debt peaking at \$667,000 million when we came into office a little over a year ago. Let me just say that figure again, because it is hard to appreciate the massive debt that we inherited from the Labor Party: \$667 billion projected public debt inherited from the Labor Party—inherited from the worst of finance minister in Australian history, Senator Penny Wong.

So, in this area of policy and in many other areas of policy, the government has had to find a economies, not because it wants to but because it has to. I know, Senator Lambie, that you do not want to leave your children and your grandchildren burdened with debt for generations, as far as the eye can see. So that is why these hard choices have to be made.

Senator Lambie, let me deal with a couple of particular issues you raised. There will be no reduction or effect upon the overseas pay and allowances. They are not part of the government's submission on defence forces remuneration. So for our brave service men and women who are deployed overseas, their allowances will not be affected. You raised the question of Christmas Day allowances—nor will that allowance, the allowances specifically provided for Christmas leave, be affected. (*Time expired*)

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:52): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Just while we are on that, first of all I remind you that there are veterans who are not serving anymore who served their country overseas and were prepared to take rounds for it. I refer the minister to the fact that an additional 1.5 per cent pay offer to the men and women of our ADF would cost approximately \$121 million. I also refer the minister to the fact that Australia gives Indonesia more than \$500 million of foreign aid each year. Can the minister explain why the extra funds for a fair ADF pay offer cannot be taken from Indonesia's foreign aid budget, given that Indonesia has a military almost 10 times the size of ours? (*Time expired*)

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:52): Thank you, Senator Lambie. Senator Lambie, as I said in my answer to your primary question, we have had to find economies in almost every area of policy. We have found economies in the foreign aid budget, by the way, and we have found economies on the topic that you raise, in our proposal for Defence Force remuneration. The reason we have to find economies across all areas of policy is that when we came into government this country was over its head in debt inherited from the Labor government. Senator Lambie, let me remind you that when the Howard government went out

of office there was no public debt in Australia—none. When the Labor government went out of office six years later, our public debt was approaching \$667 billion. As I say, we do this not because we— (*Time expired*)

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:54): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Given that the minister's slippery answers to the previous questions prove that the disgusting Liberal ADF pay offer is not really about protecting our budget—rather, it is about protecting the Liberals' plan to attack Public Service and other Australian workers' pay and conditions—what is the price you are prepared to pay for the morale of our Defence Forces and in the name of our national security?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:54): Senator Lambie, I am sorry, but I cannot accept the premise of your question. We have to find savings because we cannot pass on to the next generation the debt that the last Labor government shouldered our generation with. It would be wrong to do so—not just economically irresponsible but morally wrong to ask our children and our grandchildren to pay for our overindulgence over the past six years. We do not want to have to do this, but we have to do this. But you would also know, Senator Lambie, that one area which the government have quarantined is overall Defence spending because we were concerned for the national security of our country about allowing the percentage of the Defence budget—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Pause the clock. Order!

Senator BRANDIS: We were concerned that under the previous government the percentage of GDP spent on Defence overall had fallen to the lowest level since 1938. I am sure, Senator Lambie, you would support the government's measures to rebuild our Defence capability. (*Time expired*)