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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

ADJOURNMENT

Law Enforcement, Shipping, Ebola

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (01:45): Tasmania, like the rest of Australia, is in the grip of an ice epidemic. It is a terrible drug that takes over these users' lives and destroys families. Today I asked Senator Abetz, the Leader of the Government in this place, a number of questions about the ice crisis. His answers did not give me confidence that his government or his political party has a policy answer to this crisis, which needs to be addressed immediately. He was unable to answer why he and other members of the Liberal and National Parties have allowed gang of drug dealers, the Rebels motorcycle gang to set up headquarters opposite a Tasmanian primary school.

To be fair to the senator, the Rebels outlaw motorcycle gang did not establish the headquarters in Hobart under the recently elected Liberal government. It was the Tasmanian Labor-Greens government over many years that allowed outlawed motorcycle groups to establish, grow and prosper their business. However, it is the Liberal Party that is now in power and it is up to the Liberal Party to put in place laws, policies and programs which will put in jail the drug dealers and protect our children from the scourge of ice and other modern drugs. These drugs are 'one pill can kill and one can hook.'

Senator Abetz's reply to my question today was not good enough. When you cut through all his political waffle and excuses, Senator Abetz was saying: 'Outlaw motorcycle gangs and the ice epidemic are not my problem. Do not bother me with it; talk to local or state governments. I am an important federal senator.' Sometimes I get the impression that I am the only politician in Tasmania who finds it disgusting that an outlaw motorcycle gang can set up headquarters on a site which brazenly overlooks a schoolyard—and a primary school at that.

This evening I have listened carefully to the Greens in their debates. If only they displayed the same passion about protecting our children from outlaw motorcycle gangs and ice, as they do about stopping climate change and ice sheets melting—something they know they will never be able to do because the climate is always changing. Why don't the Greens put the same energy into protecting our children from outlaw bikers and their filthy drugs, as they put into being pimps for Indonesian people smugglers? It is no wonder we are now in the middle of an epidemic of ice and other dangerous drugs, when we have had politicians like Eric Abetz and Christine Milne in power for far too long.

The ice crisis is linked to the rise of the influence of outlaw motorcycle gangs. I know that there is a sense of fear in our Tasmanian community and a reluctance of people to speak out. I have met with senior journalists who know exactly what is happening—who is making the drugs and who is selling them. Every Tasmanian politician must take a hard line, show some courage and speak out against the people who make and peddle these evil drugs to our children. We all know who is profiting from our children's addictions—it is the outlaw bokie scum. Who is the worst scum? Is it the scum who makes and sells these drugs to our children and young people? Is it the scum who lead our community and know exactly what has been happening and yet have deliberately turned a blind eye for decades? How many politicians have quoted Edmund Burke's famous saying in their first speeches:

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people to do nothing—

and then sat back and enjoyed the perks of office? These politicians are either scared or too lazy, or both, to take a stand up to these outlaw bokie scum who deliberately target and enslave our children with these evil drugs. Apart from locking them up and throwing away the key, what else can we do to break this cycle of addiction?

I addressed that issue this afternoon when I asked Senator Abetz this question:

... will the minister join with me and help to introduce laws into this place which will give the parents of children—those 18 and under—who become hooked on highly addictive drugs like ice the legal right to involuntarily detox their children of this dreadful drug?

His response, surprisingly, did not totally disappoint me. He did not dismiss the legal concept out of hand, so I hope that the government will consider my idea. It is very simple. At the moment, no parent as far as I am aware has in a state of Australia the right to involuntarily detox their children should they become addicted to ice or any other dangerous and illegal drug. I have heard many heartbreaking stories from Tasmanian parents and how helpless they feel or felt when their child became addicted to an illegal drug. The standout comment was this: 'All I wanted was a chance to talk to my child and know that I was talking to my child and not the drug in control of my child. I want to know that my child is making the decision and not the drug.'

The current medical system does not allow for involuntary detox of any child, and consequently the drug dealers and makers are happy because they know they will be guaranteed a steady supply of young customers. The laws which protect the civil rights of children who are controlled by their addiction to drugs also take away the rights of loving parents to protect their most precious gifts from God. I have heard stories of desperate parents who have tricked their drug addicted children to outer islands of Fiji and other parts of the world and then kept them there until the drugs ran out or were destroyed. Then they waited for their child to go cold turkey detox and, after four weeks of yelling abuse and wild behaviour, they got to once again talk to their children and not the drug. They gave their child a chance to make decisions for themselves again in life and know that it was not the drug making the decision for their child. I know people will disagree with me, but I can guarantee that those parents who sat helplessly and were forced to watch their family life spiral out of control will agree with my remedy.

There must be a better way of protecting our children. The current law forces parents to wait for the phone call from police to say their runaway 17-year-old is in detention and then get a good night's sleep because at least you will not get a phone call or knock on the door that tells you that your child has been found dead in the gutter with a needle or ice pipe nearby. Changing the laws to strengthen the rights of parents to ensure that their children receive life-saving medical treatment, however, is only one part of the solution. Other action we must take is to ensure that enough medical resources and rehab centres are available to our families. According to research I commissioned from the Parliamentary Library:

In 2012-13, over half (56 per cent) of the 714 publicly funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies in Australia were non-government, and these agencies provided almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of treatment episodes that were closed in 2012-13.

It should be noted, however, that a significant number of these agencies are likely to provide counseling, information and education and support and case management only, and not rehabilitation and withdrawal management (detoxification) programs.

The table below breaks down government and non-government treatment agencies by jurisdiction. According to the table from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare contained in the parliamentary research paper, out of 317 government alcohol and other drug treatment agencies in Australia, seven were located in Tasmania. That is one treatment centre for about every 70,000 Tasmanians. Compare that with New South Wales, which has 186 government alcohol and other drug treatment agencies, making for one treatment centre for 40,000 people in New South Wales, and South Australia, which has 48 government alcohol and other drug treatment agencies, making one treatment centre per 33,000 people in South Australia. This means that, when compared with both New South Wales and South Australia, Tasmania on a population basis has around half the government run alcohol and other drug treatment agencies.

This is an issue that all Tasmanian government representatives, whether local, state or federal, should be concerned with, even if they do not agree with my proposition to change the laws to allow parents the right to involuntarily detox their drug-affected children. This is another issue that I will be making a priority, and eventually this place will see a bill—it may be a private member's bill; it could be a government bill I cooperate on, but a bill nonetheless—which will empower and make legal, Australia-wide, the involuntary detox of children addicted to the terrible drug ice.

I now turn to a different subject—coastal shipping. Many times, in my short service in the chamber, I have politically smacked a number of senators of this place—because they probably deserved it. However, tonight I would like to pat Liberal Senator Colbeck on the back after he delivered a fine speech in this chamber about the costs and impacts of coastal shipping for Australia and, in particular, our home state of Tasmania. Senator Colbeck successfully argued that the Labor reforms to coastal shipping have catastrophically failed and hurt Australian industry.

This has been made clear to me in a number of meetings I have had with some of Tasmania's biggest employers and businesses who all rely on coastal shipping and other vessels to move their products to mainland and overseas customers. One of the important points that Senator Colbeck made is that, since the Labor reforms, there are now 64 per cent fewer vessels on the Australian coastline and two million tonnes less freight.

Senator Colbeck also notes that today shipping costs Bell Bay Aluminium \$29.70 per tonne, compared with \$18.20 when the Labor laws were first introduced, yet the rate offered by a foreign vessel today remains at \$17.50. Bell Bay Aluminium—the Greens will call it one of the biggest polluters; I call it one of our biggest employers—is hit with an extra \$4 million per year in shipping costs because of a failed Labor-Greens policy. These extra costs, like the outrageous and unfair mainland RET policy, endanger the jobs of thousands of direct and indirect Tasmanian jobs.

Senator Colbeck correctly highlighted that \$550,000 of additional shipping costs were added to another great Tasmanian company and employer, Simplot. I will have more to say shortly about that company and the challenges it faces keeping 778 employees in a job because of hostile and unfair industrial action.

Senator Colbeck pointed out that he spoke to a Tasmanian business that told him that it was 'cheaper to bring product from New Zealand to every port in the country except Melbourne than it is to bring it from Tasmania'. Everything Senator Colbeck spoke about in this chamber is true, in my opinion, and I agree with his call to change the laws on Australia's coastal shipping in order to protect the viability of our major businesses and the jobs of tens of thousands of Tasmanians.

There will be some union members who are alarmed by these comments because they will think that their members' jobs will be under threat. My message to them—apart from, 'Get your mates, who are about to shut down Simplot and lose 778 food processing jobs to New Zealand'—is this. We can work together. We can do both. We can protect your members' jobs and lower the cost of coastal shipping for Tasmanian and Australian businesses.

Once again, I congratulate Senator Colbeck on a fine speech. I cannot guarantee I will say that of every speech, but I am a big believer in giving credit where credit is due.

I now turn to the issue of Ebola. Despite what some sections of the media in Tasmania say, this is an important issue for the people I represent. The disclosure recently that each week 15 to 30 people from West Africa are allowed into Australia without proper quarantine stunned me and many other people. It was just further proof that this government has seriously mismanaged this outbreak. And it has been only by good luck rather than good management that Ebola has not arrived in Australia and Tasmania.

The health minister and PM—indeed, the vice-chief of our military—seem to forget the fact that this disease could lie dormant in the human host for up to 21 days and then present as a fever, and then that person, while highly contagious, for days, could walk around spreading the disease to unsuspecting victims. These facts mean that Australia, while ever international air travel from Ebola hot spots is allowed, will not be safe. Indeed, I remind this place of credible predictions that, by January next year, one million people could be infected. That means at least 500,000 will die, and I do not want any of that number to be Tasmanians or Australians.

So I want this government to answer some simple questions that many people have been asking me. Can Ebola be transmitted through airborne contact; flea, tick or mosquito bites; or contaminated surfaces? Can Ebola recur in a patient who survives the first attack of the virus? If so, is that patient contagious while Ebola lies dormant for a period of months or years?

On 17 October, I put forward a five-point action plan for Ebola and received some criticism from some sections of the media, government and public. Most of my recommendations have since been adopted, as the politically correct management of Ebola has unnecessarily endangered millions of Australians. My plan was as follows: ban and make illegal all travel, other than official or military, to and from all African and/or other countries experiencing Ebola outbreaks; immediately boost Customs resources and install thermal imaging at all our international airports in order to ensure that all overseas arrivals are scanned for symptoms of Ebola; establish safe quarantine facilities and dedicated Ebola treatment areas, separate from the main hospitals, close to each international arrival port in Australia; in conjunction with the ADF, establish and properly resource a number of mobile Australian specialist medical teams, similar in organisational structure to the MASH teams of the Vietnam era, capable of domestic and international deployment—they must be equipped to treat and study outbreaks of Ebola and other lethal exotic diseases; and establish an Ebola and other deadly disease medical research unit

capable of engaging in and contributing to world-best research. These medical experts must be able to answer common questions about Ebola.

In closing, I would like to thank the hundreds of people who contact my office each week. I try to read as many emails as possible. In relation to Ebola, I have received this email from Ronald Bastian JP, who owns a health and pest management company. Ronald writes:

Dear Senator Lambie

I didn't get to hear the reply to your question regarding the possibility of various insects such as "fleas" possibly carrying the Ebola virus and transferring it to unaffected people ... I have sent an email to the World Health Organization with the same enquiry and here is a copy of the email I sent and my contact details at the foot of the email ...

Ronald then goes on to write:

My understanding of the spread of Ebola might be scant and I might be considered by the medical staff that are currently handling this epidemic as speaking out of ignorance, but, I am constantly bewildered, not hearing any mention of why insects have not been a consideration for the continuing cross-infection of the virus.

Since historical outbreaks of diseases such as malaria have been contributed to mosquitoes and fleas carrying the bubonic plague via rats, it is crystal clear to me that any sufferer who is constantly exposed to either flying or crawling blood-seeking insects and body- fluid seeking flies, including all species of a parasitic nature that live their entire life cycles on humans as well as animals must be seriously considered as a possible conduit for cross-infection and ongoing new cases. Parasite insects can travel on individuals on all forms of public transport especially long flights on planes.

I think it is time the government answered my and Mr Bastian's questions about the transfer of Ebola and stopped the nasty personal attacks.