



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

BILLS

**Social Services and Other
Legislation Amendment (2014
Budget Measures No. 6) Bill 2014**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 17 November 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 17 November 2014 Page 11 Questioner Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (11:09): I rise to speak to the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures No. 6) Bill 2014. This bill will have a severe financial impact on struggling Tasmanian and Australian families, students, disabled people, seniors and veterans through a range of 10 heartless measures, and I will not support this legislation. In particular, limiting the family tax benefit part A large-family supplement to families with four or more children, removing the family tax benefit part A per child add-on to the higher income-free area for each additional child after the first and targeting family tax benefit part B by reducing the primary earner income limit from \$150,000 a year to \$100,000 a year will cause real hardship for more than 50 per cent of the Tasmanian population, so I will not support this cruel legislation.

Of course, there is another reason why I have chosen to vote against this legislation, and that is: as a protest and as a matter of conscience and principle, I will vote against all government legislation until the men and women of our Army, Navy and RAAF receive a fair pay rise and their Christmas-entitlement leave back.

Before I detail the reasons for my conscience vote to support members of the ADF, it is important to note that even if I had not made that promise to our Defence families I would have voted against this bill because it also targets our veterans by ceasing the indexation of the clean energy supplement; pausing from 1 July 2015 the indexation for two years of the assets value limits for all working-age allowances, student payments and parenting payment single; pausing from 1 July 2017 the indexation for three years of the assets-test-free areas for all pensions other than parenting payment single; and including untaxed superannuation in assessment for the Commonwealth seniors health card for all new cardholders from 1 January 2015.

It is a well-known fact that this chamber is not controlled by the Abbott led Liberal-National Party government. For the greater majority of Tasmanians and for the greater majority of Australians, the fact that this chamber is not controlled by the Liberal-Nationals government is a huge relief because, by their actions, they have proven that they are bullies and liars. By their actions they have proved that, under the smokescreen of budget repair, they simply want to take money and entitlements from ordinary, struggling Australians whilst rewarding their rich mates who give money and favours to the Liberal and National parties.

The government legislative program presented before this Senate has no mandate. It has no moral force. Reasonable, fair-minded Australians have no choice but to oppose the greater majority of government policies presented to this place because they are nothing more than a political ambush. The key Abbott government reforms in health, education and social entitlements were not taken to the Australian people before the last federal election. The government legislation and budget cuts that we are asked to consider daily in this Senate are illegitimate. They were hidden and covered from the Australian people before the last election. If the truth about the Liberals' plan for Australia had been known before the last election then the Abbott-Hockey government would never have been placed in a privileged position of power—not ever.

It was only after the Liberal-National Party government was formed that the Tasmanian and Australian people were told that university funding would be cut and that, under the smokescreen of reform, students would be forced into massive debt and bullied into paying double or triple for their tertiary education. It was only after the PM and Hockey took charge of the nation's capital in the lower house that their true legislative reform agenda was revealed: the universal nature of our health system would be undermined, and sick people and families would be charged what is effectively an extra tax to visit the doctor. It was only after the PM and Hockey took charge of the nation's capital in the lower house that we found out that billions of dollars of desperately needed entitlements and tax concessions would be taken away from struggling Tasmanian and Australian families. And it was only after the majority of Australian Defence Force members voted to support Mr Abbott and Mr Hockey—indeed, on the day just before the Melbourne Cup—that the men and women of our Army, Navy and RAAF were officially told that they would have thousands of dollars worth of holidays, travel entitlements and meal

allowances stripped away from them for efficiency dividends and that a real pay cut would be imposed on the members of our Defence forces.

Surely government members in this chamber are not arrogant or delusional enough to think that the 75,000, give or take, full-time and part-time members of the ADF and the tens of thousands of their families and friends would have voted for this Abbott government if they had known that our ADF's pay and working conditions would have been attacked in such a cowardly manner by the PM and Mr Hockey. If you think that, then call a double-dissolution election and see what verdict the people of Tasmania and Australia deliver this time, when they are fully informed.

Getting back to the point I made at the beginning of my speech, if all Labor opposition, Greens and crossbench senators unite on a particular bill or issue presented in this place and vote against it, then the government's bill will be defeated in this great chamber of debate. In defeating the government's legislation, the Senate—the states' house of review—will have sent the government a powerful, clear message.

Today I am calling on all crossbenchers, Greens and the Labor opposition to unite on one important matter: to vote against all government legislation and send a powerful and clear message to the Abbott led government. That message that I would like all non-government senators to unite on is a unique and special one, about something which fundamentally affects Australia's ability to maintain our national security and defend ourselves.

Quite simply, by voting against government legislation, this Senate chamber would reflect the overwhelming will of the Australian people and say: 'PM, your pay offer to the men and women of the Australian Defence Force is unfair, unjust and an appalling insult.' As a matter of fact, it is absolute rubbish. How you government people over there can do that to these men and women who put their lives on the line is beyond me. Do you have any idea of the consequences it is going to have for our national security and the morale of these men and women, or what it is already doing? I am getting hundreds of emails and phone calls, because these men and women have no voice. Mr Abbott, your pay offer to our ADF must be withdrawn and replaced with new deal—a fair deal which at least keeps track with inflation and safeguards their existing holidays and travel, meal and accommodation allowances.

My critics will say that I should not be so naive and idealistic. How dare a senator suggest that the government be held to ransom over one issue! Ordinarily, I would agree; one issue should not be able to bring this place to a halt. However, the ADF pay crisis caused by this government is, in my view, without peer or precedent and is the only issue that should bring the nation's capital to a halt.

And, speaking of bringing the nation's capital to a halt, it was no coincidence that the Abbott government chose to announce their disgusting and humiliating pay offer to the ADF, and the Christmas leave they are taking off them, on the eve of the Melbourne Cup—trying to slip it under the carpet. Shame. Our Prime Minister and his cabinet knew exactly what they were doing by tasking the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence with the dirty job of announcing, on the eve of that race that stops the nation, the decision which confirms the Abbott government's betrayal of the men and women of our defence forces. The Abbott government were deliberately attempting to minimise the political damage that would be caused to them, by having the ADF pay betrayal compete for media attention with issues generated by the Melbourne Cup, one of Australia's great cultural events.

What this Abbott led government did not count on was the genuine community outrage generated by this slap in the face to the men and women of our Defence Force. What they did not count on was the media attention and public debate generated by the non-government members of this place who chose to speak out in favour of a better deal for our Army, Navy and RAAF. So, what started as a sneaky, slick government campaign to cover up and lessen the political fallout from an appalling government decision will now blow up in the face of this mean and tricky government that still thinks it can lie its way into office and bully or bribe the crossbenchers into becoming accomplices in what is nothing more than a filthy little crime.

If we do not have a secure Australia, if Australia's national security is undermined, then we have absolutely nothing. Everything we work for—education, health, food security, energy security—is placed at risk for this and future generations.

Today I want to remind members of this chamber that the eyes of the 75,000, give or take, members of the ADF and their families, and the 300,000 recipients of veterans affairs entitlements and their families—the eyes of nearly a million Australians—will be watching how you vote on this bill, and their ears will be listening for

reasons why you chose to support the Abbott government in betraying the men and women of our defence forces. Their hearts will feel it if you are prepared to fight for them when it counts in this chamber or to just use them for photo opportunities on a few days of the year, when Australia remembers its fallen, the wounded and their grieving families and friends.

I have no doubt that, if the non-government members of this chamber show courage—like our Defence Force personnel—and unite on and rally around this unique matter; vote against the government's legislation program; and turn every vote in this chamber into a referendum on the Abbott government's appalling pay offer to the members of our armed forces, then the Abbott government will be forced to bow down before the will of the Australian people and immediately renegotiate a fairer and just pay deal for the men and women of our Army, Navy and RAAF.

Due to the enormous amount of feedback that I have received over the last week or so since the Melbourne Cup, I am going to quote a few of the emails and letters that have been sent to my office. Of course, I will be redacting any names associated with those, for the people who are still serving, in uniform, because otherwise we all know what will happen: they will be punished. One of them says:

I am currently serving in the RAN, having worked my way through the ranks from a 15 year old Junior Recruit thus currently have served 38 years in defence of our country.

I have deployed on Special Operations in Submarines, served in the Solomon Islands on Op Anode, 3 tours with Op Catalyst (Middle East Area of Operations, Iraq and Afghanistan) and Op Resolute, Border Protection.

Over the period of my service I have seen a steady decline in conditions of service which has resulted in a loss of allowances, leave travel warrants and travel conditions, to name a few. And if I was considering joining the ADF today, I would think twice. I am disappointed to realise that the general population does not really understand how serving Defence members feel as they cannot voice their issues in public.

Radio shock jock, Ray Hadley from 2GB, believes 'Defence members must be satisfied' as he has not heard from any of them complaining about the 1.5 per cent pay increase. It is quite obvious he does not understand the constraints members are under when wanting to complain about their conditions of employment or their employer—the federal government.

One particular thing I am uneasy about is that we are effectively taking a pay cut when compared to the rate of CPI and have lost leave and removal entitlements. I can see a greater cut looming when rental allowance is increased to reflect CPI and the 'current civilian market rent'. I do have a point I wish to make about double standards. Although a politician would argue it is a 'condition of their service' and thus an entitlement, as a Defence member if your partner has a home in the area you are posted to, you are not entitled to receive rent allowance as it is deemed you have an interest in that property even if it belongs to your partner, not to you personally. Yet if a politician—let's say the Treasurer—has a wife who owns a property in Canberra then the politician can claim an allowance to rent that property from their partner as it is deemed that they do not own or have an interest that property. Go figure.

How is it that one set of rules applies to Defence—a rule that can see the member charged with fraud and serve a custodial sentence—yet a politician gets away scott free? I would appreciate your point of view on this matter and thank you for representing Defence members who are voiceless in the matters of pay and conditions of service.

Email No. 2 reads:

Thank you be being the voice for all of us service personnel who are unable to voice our disgust and disdain about the pay rise or should I say pay cut that has been forced upon us. I would have been happier without the 1.5 per cent pay rise as long as the other conditions were not cut, which they term as 'productivity improvements'.

How is the Defence force now measured in productivity since we don't make profit from our business...

From my calculations, which maybe wrong... I will get an extra \$3.56 a day pre-tax or a massive total of about \$1301 per year pre-tax.

Since I have signed on the line and accept all the inherent conditions of being on call, this makes an hourly rate increase of about 14.85c an hour. In what they term as 'productivity Improvements' they are taking six days leave off a majority of us, which works out to about \$1,443 on my current rate, which outweighs the pay rise by about \$142.

So please keep doing what you can to make everyone aware of what they are doing to us.

Email No. 3 reads:

I have listened to John Laws since 1972 when I was working in Sydney as a police officer. I have generally agreed with most of his comments and views.

I have previously listened with interest to your conversations with John Laws on his radio show.

Today I listened to your latest conversation with Mr Laws. Based on my experiences in the police force, as far as pay and conditions are concerned, I can empathise with the plight of our military personnel.

The general public appears to have more idea of how it feels to be treated the way our military personnel are currently being treated than does Mr Laws.

It is a common phenomenon for people who become wealthy and powerful to lose touch with reality and lose any humble traits they may have once possessed. I urge you to continue in your fight for fairness in this country.

Email No. 4 says:

Currently I am due to be posted from Sydney to Perth and will be leaving my family in losing my Sydney location. Previously I would have been eligible for the \$94.34 per week.

Now I get \$385 to stock the pantry as described in the above link to para 16. This is a substantial amount of money and is far greater than the entire pay rise over the three-year period.

This point has not been identified, I believe, at any level and I feel the only person currently willing to defend Defence members is Jacqui Lambie.

In addition, where I currently work and with the Navy having a 18-month posting cycle, we have a large amount of members who choose to have their dependents remain at their losing posting location for whatever reason.

This massive pay cut which is under the heading 'productivity increases' has come at a massive shock to these members who only today realised this.

This was last Friday. The email continues:

This pay cut will reduce capability as currently members are happy to move with their postings at a short notice and have the family follow up once kids schools and spouse employment are sorted out.

This will change this and force many members to choose between remaining with family and permanently leaving the Defence Force or moving with a massive pay cut.

Defence Force members are happy to deploy at short notice and be away from family; however, you know you are coming home after the deployment.

There is a major difference moving whole families from one side to the other side of the country by removing was deemed adequate last week from \$5,000 per year potentially down to \$385.

MWD(U) provisions were added to the pay and conditions manual, PACMAN, to allow Defence greater flexibility and to retain members.

It would be great if we could collect the data of members who are in MWDU discharge from Defence.

If members discharge in a large number, any deemed productivity increase would be quickly dissolved.

As a matter of fact, if they get out and walk, like I am hearing they are going to, the amount of money it is going to cost this country for what? All over \$130 million? I will not be the only person in this country laughing at you. Wake up. This is about national security. This is about our Defence Force personnel. *(Time expired)*