



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting
Veterans and their Families First) Bill 2019**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 3 April 2019

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 3 April 2019	Source House
Page 42	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (13:22): While many important reforms take time, and no responsible legislation should ever be rushed without detailed, thoughtful consideration, the concept of an Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant has been discussed and has enjoyed the support of key stakeholders and peak representative bodies for quite some time. The Liberal National Party in Queensland, of which I am a proud member, has a strong and, indeed, long record of ably and consistently advocating for the interests of veterans in my home state. I recall that I, together with my LNP parliamentary colleagues, both state and federal, voted unanimously in favour of an Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant at our party's annual convention on no fewer than two separate occasions over the last five years.

An Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant is organic Liberal National Party policy. This is a genuine grassroots reform, comprehensively endorsed by party members. It is a reform that enjoys not only the support of veterans but also support from the wider community, especially in Queensland, where you are likely to see more 'Thank you for your service' stickers on the backs of cars, trucks and utes than anywhere else in Australia. The combined voices of key veterans groups, Liberal National Party members and many right across the wider community have been speaking out on this issue—all asking for special recognition for our veterans and their families.

At times, the champions of this cause must have felt frustrated and may have thought that nobody was listening. Well, Deputy Speaker, I can tell you who was listening to that groundswell, that persistent agitation on the issue: the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and, more significantly, the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister took prompt action to make an Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant a priority, leading to a joint media statement with the minister on 27 November last year, where the Prime Minister announced that this Liberal-National government would develop a covenant to be enacted in legislation to recognise the unique nature of military service and to better support veterans and their families.

Despite the usual reckless and unfounded scaremongering from the Labor Party, this Liberal-National government is absolutely committed to putting veterans and their families first, which is why in this federal budget we have invested more than \$11.5 billion in the services and support mechanisms that are relied upon by more than 280,000 veterans and their families. This is a real increase in funding of more than \$300 million on last year. This government is focused on making it easier and faster for veterans to access the services they need and deserve when and where they need them. The veteran recognition program and the Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant are part of that commitment. The Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant will provide a lasting opportunity for all Australians, and especially the business community, to recognise the service of all veterans who have served, even so much as one day, as members of the Australian Defence Force. This bill is part of a long-anticipated recognition package for veterans and their families. The purpose of the bill is to permanently acknowledge and formally thank veterans and their families for the unique commitment and sacrifice they have made, and in many cases continue to make, in the service of Australia, defending those precious freedoms we so value as a nation.

As part of the joint media statement last year by the Prime Minister and minister, entitled 'Recognising and respecting our veterans', it was announced that a unique veteran card, replacing the DVA health card, together with a special lapel pin would be introduced. The intention of these mechanisms is to ensure that we as a community are providing due recognition to those who are prepared to stand and defend our nation.

I want to finish, if I may, by paying tribute to the many people who have fought to see this change made. I wish to acknowledge the tireless advocacy over many years of Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Graeme Mickelberg of the Sunshine Coast, together with Mr John Lowis and Mr Wynn Fowles of the Defence Force Welfare Association. These people never gave up on an Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant to better acknowledge and protect the needs of veterans and their families. With this in mind, I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hogan): The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.