



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Afghanistan

SPEECH

Monday, 17 September 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Prentice, Jane, MP

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Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (21:27): I rise today to speak on the member for Melbourne's motion which calls on the government to set a date for the safe return of Australian troops from Afghanistan. I welcome the ongoing contribution of all members to the debate about Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, but I do note that the member for Melbourne's motion is fundamentally naive to what the defence community has to say about this issue and naive to Australia's contribution of capacity building and training efforts abroad. No government wants to send their servicemen and women to war. No decision by government to send our troops is taken lightly. It is the responsibility of all members of government—indeed, all members of this House—to make informed decisions.

I have to question just how informed the member for Melbourne's motion is, because if the member for Melbourne had spoken to the troops at the barracks—like Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera in Ryan—he would know that they want to continue our effort in Afghanistan. They want to see the job through. They want to see the job through in the memory of those who have died, the 38 soldiers we have lost there, our brave men who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. If he had been there himself, like I was privileged to be, with the member for Dickson and our Senate colleagues who went and met with the soldiers in Afghanistan, in Tarin Kot and Kandahar, he would know that our soldiers on the ground believe they are making a difference—and indeed they are making a difference. And they want to see the job through in the true Anzac spirit. They are proud of what they are doing. They are working to achieve a better place for everyone in this world.

As we have heard, one of the big issues there is literacy, with less than 10 per cent of the male population and less than one per cent of the female population who are literate in that country. Literacy is a great enabler, and that is where Australia is doing such a wonderful job in funding schools and education facilities for the Afghanis. Even the members of the Afghan national army want us to stay and get on with the job. To conclude, the coalition will continue to work with the government and all members of the Defence community to ensure that Australia's contribution to the International Security Assistance Force and the people of Afghanistan is something that we will look back on with honour. As the member for Eden-Monaro said, we must not set an end date we must set an end state.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.