



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Minister for Defence

SPEECH

Wednesday, 26 November 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Zappia, Tony, MP	Question No.	

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (16:00): I speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Batman. Last year the Minister for Defence, Senator Johnston, said on 8 May 2013: 'We will deliver those submarines from right here at ASC in South Australia.' He said, 'The coalition today is committed to building 12 new submarines here in Adelaide.' It was no slip of the tongue. It was said very deliberately, because the submarine contract mattered to South Australia in the period leading up to the election. It was indeed a key South Australian federal election issue. The minister at the time knew that and made that commitment in order to try to win votes in South Australia.

It is interesting, as we debate this, that there is not a South Australian Liberal member of parliament here in the chamber to support the workers of South Australia. I remind those South Australian federal Liberal MPs that we on this side of the House will remind the voters of South Australia—right through to the next election—about the commitment made by Minister Johnston in 2013. They can rest assured of that. We will remind them, because it is another broken promise of the Abbott government for South Australia.

On top of having had the auto industry shafted, South Australians see this issue as even more important now than it was in 2013. The Abbott government is now trying to shift the promise from 'We will build the submarines in South Australia,' to 'The work will be centred around South Australia.' We heard the word 'centred' used by the Prime Minister today in answer to a question from me and others on this side of the House.

Mr Feeney: It is deceitful!

Mr ZAPPIA: As the member for Batman said, it is deceitful, because the words were 'We will build them there.' It is part of their mantra and it will not wash with the people of South Australia. Even worse—and quite disgracefully—the minister has now embarked on a narrative of trashing the ASC in South Australia. First, he said it will cost \$60 billion to \$80 billion to build the submarines in South Australia—without ever giving any figures or discussing the matter with them—and then he talked about the disgraceful mess regarding the Air Warfare Destroyer program, knowing full well that most of the reasons for the cost blow-out were matters beyond the control of the ASC.

Yesterday, when he said, 'Do you wonder why I wouldn't trust them to build a canoe here?' he simply went too far. The comments are insulting, they are ignorant, they are ill informed and they offend the thousands of workers of that industry—workers, engineers and designers—who know that is simply not true. The problem is, he will not even commit to an open-tender process. If he were a fair minister on this issue why would he not commit to an open-tender process and allow everyone to put in their bids?

I will quickly go to another matter. Last year, the Prime Minister visited Japan in April. In June, the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, and the Defence minister went to Japan. In August, the Prime Minister of Japan visited Australia. Also in August a Japanese delegation visited the ASC facilities, in South Australia, for undisclosed purposes. It may be just coincidence, but it begs the question: what backroom deals were done by the Prime Minister to secure the Japan-Australia free trade agreement, and was the submarine contract part of those deals?

This is indeed a serious matter. It goes to the heart of Australia's national security. It commits Australia to tens of billions of dollars of government expenditure and it affects the jobs of thousands of Australians. Most importantly, it is critical to Australia's Defence manufacturing capability. Senator Johnston, not just through his comments yesterday but also through a series of actions since the election, has shown himself to be incompetent. He is now a lame-duck defence minister.

The future of Australia's national security is far too important to be entrusted to a defenceless minister, and the Prime Minister should cut him adrift. That is what this motion seeks to do. I assure members opposite that I have had emails from people in South Australia who are as outraged about the minister's comments as we are on this side of the House. The Prime Minister should take note of what people are saying out there in the community.