



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

National Police Remembrance Day

SPEECH

Monday, 20 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

Source House
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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (11:40): Firstly, I acknowledge the presentations by the member for Macarthur and the member for Batman, for their spirited responses to this National Police Remembrance Day. I also went to Inverloch on 29 September, along with a whole band of the community, representing the federal government with regard to what police officers do.

The point I would like to make is that, unlike the member for Macarthur, I cannot identify with what a policeman goes through in their daily activities—he said he left his family in the mornings in the full knowledge of what was ahead in the day but also having no idea of what was ahead in the day. We do not live that life—although perhaps we do in some ways: we have no idea what is going to come next! But there is only a handful of people—five people, as the member for Macarthur point out—who really understand what it is like to be a serving police officer. They are serving in this House today, or their parents were, or their husbands are or they have some direct connection to that. They understand.

Of course, having said that, that does not mean we cannot—local, state and federal governments—enter into the remembrance day activities, which we all did. And I have done so for a long time—especially on award presentation days—just to recognise that which policemen and policewomen do in our communities. Quite often, they have a greater influence on young people than we ever envisage or realise. They are an inspiration: the lives that they lead and the pressures they are under are like those of the rest of us, but with that overarching responsibility they are given for our protection every day.

This motion presented by the member for Macarthur and seconded by the member for Batman:

... recognises and acknowledges the significant role that officers across Australia make to our local communities and the great deal of risk and sacrifice that comes with the job; ...

You have heard the resolution.

In my electorate, the selfless sacrifice of police officer Varli Blake stands out as a shining example of a young woman who gave her all for the job and who paid a very heavy price. Varli, who was a favourite netballer at Meeniyan Dumbalk United, and a student at Leongatha's St Laurence O'Toole's Primary School and Leongatha Secondary College, was seriously injured earlier this year when an explosion occurred in a flat in Middle Park after a leaking gas bottle ignited. Despite her ongoing rehabilitation, she could not wait to get back to work, calling hers 'the best job in the world'. Varli was not the only officer injured in the explosion. Sergeant Tony Scully and First Constable Emma Quick also suffered extensive injuries.

A number of things have made Varli's journey remarkable. Aside from the resilience of a woman who suffered burns to 32.5 per cent of her body and who has endured extremely painful operations, countless physiotherapy sessions, speech therapy and any number of other obstacles on her way towards recovery, the resilience of the police force and the community that have rallied around her has also been part of the story and an inspiration to all.

What Varli's story says to me is how much the community values the contribution of our force and how worthy the force is to have a day in honour of those whose dedication and commitment ensure continuous peace and safety across our communities.

Of course, the local police force back their own, as members in the House would understand, raising money to help her recovery. But the local communities in my electorate of McMillan have been just as keen to put their hands in their pockets to help, to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars. I believe that this is a testimony to what police and the job that they do mean to many.

There are few occupations where a real threat is faced every day, with absolute nil knowledge of what they may be walking into. That flat in Melbourne was just a routine event for these police officers. The person in the flat

was known to them and they went in. And yet, the way the police force has rallied around these three has been magnificent. I would like to say to them, 'You are on our minds all the time.' We wish them a speedy recovery and want them to know that one day, with all those injuries, they will return to work. They will return to the Victorian police force, where they obviously have great dedication. But I could understand if they said, 'That's enough.'