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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Australian Defence Force
Parliamentary Program**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 12 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

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Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (10:59): Firstly, I would like to thank and commend the member for Hinkler for bringing this motion before the House. It is something very close to my heart. Nothing gives a member of parliament a better understanding of the Australian Defence Force than this particular program. As we have heard, it is a bipartisan program that not only conveys the experience of ADF life but also gives the MPs an opportunity to work together in a particular field.

Senator Judith Adams introduced this program to me when I was first elected, and my first trip was with NORFORCE in the Northern Territory. That was followed by Talisman Sabre, a program focused on the interoperability shared between our forces and our allies in this space. One of the most profound experiences of my entire life was my visit to Afghanistan in 2011 and meeting so many of our Defence Force men and women. I was particularly keen to talk to the first combat engineers, who were doing an extraordinary job on the ground, particularly in relation to IEDs and mines. I also wanted to check the CV joints on the labs, because I knew there were some challenges there. This was at a particularly fraught time, when you consider 2011. I went to see the end of mission in East Timor, and it was very interesting to compare and contrast the mid-mission in Afghanistan with the end of mission in East Timor. I am always fascinated by the logistics and how good Defence is at logistics.

Most recently, only in the last few weeks, I have been on the USNS *Mercy* out of Bougainville. This is part of the Pacific Partnership of 2015 and is the delivery of health and a broad range of community outcomes for the Pacific, particularly Western Pacific nations. The USNS *Mercy* will deliver free health and medical experiences to over 40,000 people in that area. What a level of commitment to our near neighbours. Let me tell you, some of the people I met said that the USNS *Mercy* and its complement of medical people were a godsend. It is so important. I would like to acknowledge the work of Lynton Dixon with this particular program. For years Lynton has been the driving force of this behind the scenes. He has made sure that so many of us have had the opportunity that we so desperately wanted.

Importantly, my program in Afghanistan gave me the opportunity to go out in the community and talk about what our forces were doing. It was not just about the headlines that the media are so fond of—the negative headlines. It was about the community building and the great work on the ground that our forces and personnel were doing in community building.

The reciprocal program is very, very useful and brings Defence Force members in to spent time with us, and I think we share an enormous respect. As I have said previously in this place, as the daughter of a war widow I am very deeply committed to Defence and will stay that way. All of my experiences with this program are the most memorable experiences of my life. I have met some of the most capable, inspirational, well-trained men and women, working in some of the most challenging situations that you will ever find. One of the things I value most is our people in Defence. That is what our Defence is about—it is about the people. When you are on the ground in their working environment and you get to listen to them talk, you get the best information from the ground up—whether it is about their role in Defence and what their job is on a day-to-day basis; whether it is about the resources and the equipment; or whether it is about their families and all of the other issues that they face. This is one of the best places. The gloves are off. There is nothing that you cannot have access to. There is no-one who cannot talk to you. They can talk openly and freely, and they do.

As a member of parliament, I find that incredibly valuable in the work that I do in this place. It also brings into sharp focus for us, as we make decisions in this place as to what we request of our Defence Force men and women, exactly who we are asking it of and what the impact of it is, when you meet men and women, particularly in Afghanistan, as I did, who are perhaps on their fifth tour of duty and you consider that they are away from their families and the commitment they give in a live war zone. I commend this bill and the efforts of the Defence Force program.