



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Kokoda Challenge

SPEECH

Wednesday, 19 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Prentice, Jane, MP

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Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (09:57): It has been said that Gallipoli created a nation, but Kokoda saved a nation. At Gallipoli we fought for the British Empire, but at Kokoda we fought for Australia. The men who fought on the Kokoda Track showed courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice. It is these enduring attributes that form the core values of the Kokoda Youth Foundation. The foundation aims to inspire young Australians, particularly those from a disadvantaged background, to reach their full potential.

The foundation was established by Vietnam veteran Doug Henderson who was motivated to do so after listening to a talk about the Battle of the Kokoda Track. Doug wanted to keep the Kokoda spirit alive and believed this could be done by incorporating Kokoda values into life-changing experiences for young Australians. Ten years on, one single youth program and event has now turned into a wide range of youth programs, events and camps across several states. While the focus is on youth programs, a significant part of the foundation's funding comes from the Kokoda Challenge which is a series of kilometre-long walks throughout Queensland and Victoria.

The Brisbane challenge is held annually in Brookfield in my electorate of Ryan, and I was very proud to recently send off the 1,200 competitors. The event is now so popular that it is sold out four weeks in advance with more than half the teams comprising of local school groups. The challenge began early on a Sunday morning with competitors completing the 15- or 30-kilometre walk through the hills of Ryan electorate within nine hours. The funds raised to go towards the Kokoda Youth Foundation's programs, which take place over 12 months, with six months of physical training and mentoring and six months of community service.

Another worthy program is the Isurava Youth Boot Camp, which is an early intervention program operating in partnership with the Queensland government aimed at troubled young people who are not reaching their full potential and are at risk of entering the justice system. The aim is to empower them with the knowledge to make better decisions and to set them on a more stable path.

The Kokoda Youth Foundation is contributing to local communities, including in my electorate letter of Ryan, with money raised by the challenge events going straight back into local youth programs. This creates a vital flow-on effect with supported youths going on to support their siblings, parents, families and the wider community. Importantly, the foundation also gives back to the people of Papua New Guinea, whose ancestors supported Australian servicemen all those years ago. Each year the foundation recognises the role they played during the Battle of Kokoda by donating money and resources to communities and villages along the track. These resources go towards improving local schools and hospitals, medical teams and building and maintenance teams. Living by the core values of Kokoda—courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice—keeps the Kokoda spirit alive and encourages our young people to be the best they can.