

SPECIAL VETERANS - TRAVEL CONCESSIONS

Grievance

Mr P. PAPALIA (Peel) [9.54 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. In my inaugural speech in this place I made specific reference to our duty of care to veterans and my desire to represent their interests. My grievance today relates to a category of veterans who are worthy of particular respect and care. The veterans are those Western Australians classified as “special veterans”. By use of the term “special veterans” I refer to veterans who can claim the commonwealth Department of Veterans’ Affairs extremely disabled adjustment, intermediate rate, or totally and permanently incapacitated disability pension rates.

I have recently had discussions with Mr Ken Plane of the Extremely Disabled War Veterans Association of Western Australia. Mr Plane is a special veteran who resides in Greenwood. He first saw service in the Royal Australian Navy in the Pacific from 1945 to 1947 immediately after the Second World War. Subsequently, he enlisted in the Australian Army in 1951 and served in Korea with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. Although he has retired from the post due to ill health, Mr Plane was formerly the treasurer of the Extremely Disabled War Veterans Association of Western Australia. His wife Sue also served the association as secretary. Together they formed a commendable team that represented their members well. Mr Plane has explained the situation to me concerning the special veterans travel concessions provided by the state government. I believe this to be an important matter and, as such, I have offered to bring it to the minister’s attention.

Currently, Western Australian special veterans receive one free return journey or two single journeys each year on Transwa rail or coach services. If a person is a Western Australian special veteran who lives above the twenty-sixth parallel, he receives one free return journey by air or coach every year to Perth or elsewhere in the south west land division. It is a commendable program, and I am sure that the opportunity to travel around our vast state is well appreciated. However, Mr and Mrs Plane have brought to my attention the inequity in allowances between those offered to special veterans in our state and those offered elsewhere in the nation. They have asked that we increase the concession. I believe there is scope for improvement in what we offer veterans.

There is no doubt that the Carpenter government acknowledges and respects the service that our ex-service community has provided. The Anzac Day small grants program, chaired by the member for Yokine, is a clear indication of this government’s attitude. The government has already provided more than \$1.5 million to help Returned and Services League of Australia clubs hold commemorative services at memorials in their local areas. On Remembrance Day last year the Premier announced a further \$1 million in funding for the Anzac Day small grants program. It is a wonderful initiative and it has been enthusiastically accepted by ex-service organisations in electorates across the state, including my own. The government is further showing its support to our special veterans community by building, through Homeswest, a respite centre at the Totally and Partially Disabled Veterans Association of Western Australia headquarters, located in Baldivis, in my electorate. I have visited the site and met with the association’s advocate, Mr Peter Douglas. I can confirm that it will be an excellent addition to services for veterans in the state.

However, as we approach Anzac Day, it is timely and appropriate that we consider the contributions our veterans have made to Australia. Members of the special veterans community are people who have given much to the state and nation. They continue to suffer as a result of their contribution. Mr Plane tells me that his association consists predominantly of World War II and Korean War veterans. They number approximately 700 in Western Australia, and many are now in their 70s and 80s. As a government we should listen and respond to their request for further travel assistance. I believe that there is a simple and practical way for the state to demonstrate its appreciation for their efforts; a way to improve the quality of life for a group of people who have lived through many hardships and who continue to suffer from the injuries received in the course of their service. Veteran groups have proposed the provision of one additional intrastate trip per annum for special veterans and their approved carers. To me, this seems to be a fair ask. As we approach Anzac Day and commemorate the special efforts of Australian servicemen and women, it would be a great opportunity to present a tangible benefit to the small group of special veterans in Western Australia. I ask the minister to review the travel concessions provided to special veterans and consider providing a second intrastate trip for this special group of people who have given so much of themselves in the service of their community.

MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armada - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [9.59 am]: I thank the member for his grievance. It is fantastic that the member, who has a distinguished military career himself, has, on coming into Parliament, made an early representation on behalf of veterans and, in particular, of this group of special veterans. He has raised some important issues. Of the various classes of person who fall within this category, 710 people in Western Australia are in the extremely disabled category, about 87 people qualify for the intermediate rate of disabilities within the veteran class, and 3 213 people are totally and permanently incapacitated disability pensioners. Also, there are about 178 approved carers. In all, about 4 000 fall within the

category of special veterans or their carers. The member has asked that we consider providing those veterans with a second intrastate free trip. I take that suggestion on board and will examine the cost of it and how it might be funded. Another issue that has been raised with me and with the Premier from time to time is the granting of concessions for veterans to travel to the eastern states on the *Indian Pacific*. One of the consequences of the federal government's privatisation of that service has been that the trip between Perth and Kalgoorlie no longer falls within the federal concessions because it is a privatised operation. Veterans can travel for free on the *Prospector*, but that often involves a 10-hour wait before passengers can then catch the *Indian Pacific*. That is an impractical option for people who are frail because of either age or disability. We will also look at the possibility of providing some assistance to access trips on the *Indian Pacific*. Although the state government does not own it, and it would involve the government purchasing tickets, we will look at what can be done to provide some assistance so that people will be able to travel on that line. I will certainly put together a package. The Premier is also very keen on us resolving this issue. I compliment the member on his advocacy on behalf of that very important sector of the veteran community.