

**VETERANS — SUPPORT**

*Statement*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [9.52 pm]: I would like to associate myself closely with the sentiments that have just been expressed by Hon Dave Grills. I do so as I am a former patron of a group called Totally and Partially Disabled Veterans WA, which I have mentioned in the house before, though possibly not in the presence of a lot of the members who are here now. That association has brought me into contact with a large number of veterans and their partners, particularly veterans from the Vietnam era, although I notice that those same veterans are borrowing from their own experience and now extending fellowship and assistance to returned veterans of more recent conflicts. My association with those men and women led me to raise a couple of points in my own mind. Firstly, from the point of view of my role in the community as a member of Parliament, it led me to ask: What we do about our returned service people? What measures reasonably need to be extended to returned service personnel, and where does it cut off? How do we make good matters that might range, for example, in the case of conscripts, from an interruption to their tertiary education, which hopefully they will be able to pick up and resume, to interruptions to jobs and careers and interruptions to a whole lot of key aspects of their lives? How do we ensure that those who have been injured receive suitable attention to try to redress that sort of injury?

I was only ever in the peacetime army, thanks to the efforts of servicemen who have come before me. I have a bit of plastic that says if my knee ever goes bung again, I can go along to the Department of Veterans' Affairs and it will do something to fix it up. It does not entitle me to a free ride on the bus or anything but if my knee collapses when I am 75, if I live that long, I can have it seen to.

There are some matters that we also need to address that are of a more enduring and incapacitating sort. This is specifically what has brought me into contact with returned servicemen who have some enduring issues that in part may be related to physical injury and most certainly relate to other matters of how they adjust after the dislocating effects of being conscripted, in many cases, going off to war and then coming back and dealing with what they have seen and endured as they return to what would hopefully be a normal life but for many of them does not feel like it.

That is what raised in my mind the second point that I want to share with members tonight. It has been my experience in observing that group and its members work through various issues that the most extraordinarily resilient people in all of this are the spouses. Typically, I am talking here about the wives of returned servicemen who are facing ongoing issues as a result of their military service. I am on my feet now in support of the comments of Hon Dave Grills because I want to make the gesture, whenever I have the opportunity, of acknowledging the wives and partners of returned servicemen, such as those whom we have welcomed to the gallery tonight. These people—typically women, as I have said—are real heroes. They set an extraordinary example. They are volunteers par excellence. In many cases they have had to endure extreme difficulties in adjustment, not only in watching their husbands or partners, but also in having some of the effects of that extend to them. Every one of the women whom we are acknowledging tonight, and all of their colleagues, have chosen to tough it out, stick with it, do the right thing and play their part to make things better for the men not only whom they love but who need that sort of help. That takes a lot of commitment and courage, and that needs to be acknowledged, because that element is the most effective thing that can be done to support our returned service personnel. That goes far beyond giving them a pension or a plastic card in case their knee gets crook again, or free cigarettes or whatever else might have been applied over the years. If returned servicemen know that they have the support of their spouse, that helps to sustain them when they are working through difficult issues. It also provides a service that is to the betterment of every one of us in the community. That is why I want to salute the women whom we have welcomed to the gallery tonight, and to thank them, on behalf of the community that I represent, for never shying away from that burden, and, what is more, for now seeking to offer that same support, based on their own experience, to others who also need that extra bit of support. Thank you.

*House adjourned at 9.59 pm*