



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Forsaken Fighters Australia

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 August 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 15 August 2018	Source Senate
Page 110	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Bartlett, Sen Andrew	Question No.

Senator BARTLETT (Queensland) (19:12): Back in May, I spoke in this place about a group of Australians—Australian residents and Australian citizens—who have come to this place in recent years. I revisit the topic I raised then tonight partly because of a meeting I had today with an organisation working to support this particular unique group of Australian residents, but also in light of the debates and speeches that happened at the start of today in the Senate and the motion passed without any voice of dissent in this chamber in support of non-discriminatory immigration policy and in support of the great contribution that people from all lands and faiths make and continue to make to this nation.

Whenever I make that comment I try to always acknowledge that it is still a nation that was built on land that was never ceded and still has much unfinished business with the First Nations peoples of this land. The group I refer to—which I referred to back in May—are people, originally from Iraq and Afghanistan, who worked alongside, assisted, supported and in many cases, without doubt, saved the lives of Australian Defence personnel serving in those locations.

It is no secret that the Greens do not support the government's ongoing deployment of our troops and the wars fought in those locations. But we do recognise Defence personnel go where they are directed by governments and that it is the job of all Australians, the job of this place and the job of the government of any persuasion, to support those people when they return. I think we have a double debt to the Afghanis and Iraqis who served as interpreters, not just interpreting language but interpreting and navigating the culture, politics and atmospherics on an hour-by-hour basis in very dangerous situations. They put their lives very much on the line, witnessed horrendous scenes of violence and put not just themselves but also their families and relatives at severe and ongoing risk.

To its credit, our government has issued visas to a number of those people. It's hard to be sure exactly how many, which is a bit of an issue in itself. I've been told 600 by one source; another source suggested perhaps 200 or so individuals but maybe 900 or a thousand when we're talking about family members and children as well. But the common core problem for all of them, even when they have been given visas and allowed to settle here, is the lack of ongoing support. Back in May, I wrote to the then new veterans affairs minister, Mr Chester, to ask him to look at providing some form of recognition and some form of support for this group of people.

I met another of those people today, a man called Jan who lives in Newcastle, alongside Jason Scanes, who has founded an organisation called Forsaken Fighters Australia—which I referenced in my speech back in May—and also another veteran who lives locally, Lieutenant Colonel Damien Hick. They and their organisation are very determined to get recognition and ongoing support for this group of people, who cannot, for very obvious reasons, return to their homeland for the foreseeable future and who have suffered significant trauma directly as a result of supporting and defending Australians. It's particularly and sadly ironic, in the context of the debates we've had today, that these people are Muslim Australians who are nonetheless being vilified, despite having put their lives on the line to save Australian defence personnel.

I believe we have an ongoing and unique obligation to those people. If they don't fit the criteria for particular service recognition under current defence laws then create a special package of support for them. We can pull \$440 billion out of our back pocket to give to a Barrier Reef foundation that didn't even ask for it. Let's give some proper resourcing to this group of people, who have ongoing needs for health support and educational assistance for their children and families, and ensure that they can make the contribution to Australia in the future that we know so many other people of migrant background have made and continue to make.