

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly) (15:07): My question is addressed to the Minister for Counter Terrorism, Minister for Corrections, and Minister for Veterans Affairs. Will the Minister update the House on the progress of the veterans employment program?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order or they will be removed from the Chamber for the rest of the day.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Counter Terrorism, Minister for Corrections, and Minister for Veterans Affairs) (15:07): I am delighted to receive the question about veterans' welfare in this place, because when the member for Fairfield was the shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs for two years, he did not ask me one question about veterans' welfare. The member for Manly has great credibility in this portfolio. His father was a longstanding member of the Australian Army and was a decorated brigadier. His mother was the first female commandant of Victoria Barracks. Those on our side of the House are very keen to ensure that we celebrate the successes of our women. The member for Manly's brother-in-law, Lance Corporal Archer, was deployed to Afghanistan in 2012, therefore the member has credibility to stand up and ask in this Chamber the details of the veterans employment program.

This is what we call the Jobs for Diggers policy. Changing careers is a very difficult thing for most people. Almost 1,500 men and women are discharged from the Australian Defence Force in New South Wales each year. This represents a highly trained and work-ready resource pool. In March 2015, the New South Wales Government made a commitment to establish a program to help 200 veterans in New South Wales find suitable, sustainable and meaningful employment by 2019. This program is the first of its kind in Australia and is being repeated by Labor States, as well as Coalition States

I am delighted to report to the House that the Veterans Employment Program has exceeded its target of 200 and has so far assisted 486 former Australian Defence Force personnel find public sector jobs. It has smashed its target by 140 per cent. When the member for Prospect is removed by Chris Bowen he, too, will be able to find another job in New South Wales. The majority of new hires have been in the justice and transport clusters. Many former service personnel are also working in the health, education and finance sectors. We are incredibly proud of this program, which is the first of its kind in Australia, and supports contemporary veterans as they move into civilian work.

Ms Sophie Cotsis: What about veterans' housing?

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I acknowledge the interjection of the member for Canterbury. When the Minister for Health was the Minister responsible for housing, he allocated \$1 million to prioritise veterans housing. To date \$400,000 has been utilised. The Minister for Health should be congratulated. Those opposite should stop

criticising the Government and support the program. It is also a great tool for employers to reap the benefits of having uniquely skilled workers. Former Army Major Garth Callender completed multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan and will be managing the rollout of the program.

I draw the attention of the House to 39-year-old veteran Simon Petley, who had a 20-year career in the Australian Army that included three deployments to East Timor, then to Iraq and Afghanistan. He rose to the rank of warrant officer and has a decorated service record as a contemporary veteran. Simon's service involved great personal cost. He was in Iraq when his first child was born, and the family moved houses several times before the child started school. Through the Veterans Employment Program, Simon has found a job as a logistics support officer for SafeWork NSW. Simon said, "People don't understand qualifications they gain in defence. The skills that a lot of soldiers have are management of personnel, resource management, and they do not know how attractive they are to employers."

A key element of the Veterans Employment Program is an education campaign to help New South Wales Government employers understand skills that veterans bring to the workplace. The web portal assists veterans in locating public sector roles aligned with military rank. In addition, the New South Wales Government is investing in a mentoring program which pairs returned service men and women and other military personnel with young offenders in custody. Every family knows a young person who is a bit of a tearaway who has now made something of his or her life. Veterans have discipline, resilience and a dedication to service, which makes them perfect mentors. As Minister for Veterans Affairs and Minister for Corrections, I am tremendously proud of this program, which is providing positive role models for young people and also helping to reduce the rate of reoffending. I recently congratulated James Brown on his election as State President of the Returned and Services League of Australia New South Wales Branch. James is a decorated veteran, having served as an Armoured Corps officer in Afghanistan and Iraq. *[Extension of time]*

He has received medals, decorations and awards for his service, including the Deputy Chief of Joint Operations Commendation, Australian Active Service medal, Iraq 2003, International Coalition Against Terrorism clasps, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and Iraq Campaign Medal. He is the research director of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. He is a fantastic contemporary veteran and it has been heartbreaking for him to take over management at a time when its reputation has been trashed by allegations of financial mismanagement. I am confident that James will help to restore public confidence in this iconic organisation. There was overwhelming support for the Government to intervene and establish the inquiry by Patricia Bergin, SC. I acknowledge the Minister for Better Regulation. As the Premier stated, those found to have broken the law and the trust of the public will be held to account. This Government will hold people to account and restore the public trust in the RSL. The shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs in the other place opposed the inquiry. I cannot imagine what she was attempting to protect.

Today the Premier and I called for history teachers to submit an expression of interest to participate in the 2018 Premier's Anzac Memorial Scholarship. On

Thursday 21 September high school students will take a government-funded trip to Australian battlefields in Belgium and France to learn about the Anzac legacy. During the Centenary of Anzac commemorations it is fitting that the New South Wales Government honours the legacy of our veterans with scholarship tours and memorials. As I have outlined to the House, this Government is committed to providing real opportunities for employment, allowing veterans to contribute to society and, as the member for Canterbury interjected, providing priority housing for homeless veterans. I commend the Veterans Employment Program to the House.