

CENTENARY OF ANZAC

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Veterans Affairs) (10:31): It is an honour to stand here as both the member for Baulkham Hills and Minister for Veterans Affairs to take note of the Centenary of Anzac. I acknowledge the presence in the House of the former shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs, the member for Fairfield. He joined me yesterday in taking part in the debate on a ministerial statement to acknowledge the service of the Vietnam veterans who honoured us with their attendance in the gallery. I thank all members of the House who participated in that debate. Members gave the Vietnam veterans an unsolicited standing ovation. I spoke to the group afterwards and was told that for some it was the most emotional experience they had had in their post-military service.

Those men who were here yesterday, having lunch with me, attending the debate and acknowledging the House's commemoration, have not always been treated in the way they deserve. As I mentioned in the ministerial statement, some of them told me that on their return from Vietnam they could not march on Anzac Day because the RSL did not recognise their service. They were vilified, criticised and ignored by not only society but also the veterans community. It is a stain on both the RSL and the community that those Vietnam veterans had to wait until 1987 for their welcome home parade. Over lunch yesterday it was made very clear to me by the Acting State President of the RSL, John Haines, that his main focus as acting president and as a Vietnam veteran is to ensure that contemporary veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands, East Timor, Western Sahara and Bougainville are not treated in the same way as those who were part of the Vietnam contingent.

I acknowledge the Premier for his support of our veterans during the Centenary of Anzac. The Premier and I had a very interesting discussion on my appointment as Parliamentary Secretary in 2014. He said at a function that he wanted to celebrate the Centenary of Anzac. I said that I did not know whether we should say "celebrate" and that we should commemorate. As usual, the Premier came back with a response that put me to shame. The Premier said, "Yes, but we do celebrate courage and valour." I am happy to stand corrected on celebrating the Centenary of Anzac because the Premier was probably right. When we hosted those Vietnam veterans yesterday, when the Premier, the Governor and members of Parliament held a reception at Government House on Saturday afternoon for Vietnam veterans, and when the Premier attended the ramp ceremony a few weeks ago for the 30 or so veterans who were finally returned home to be buried in Australia, we were celebrating their courage and valour. We are celebrating something that makes them different from other citizens in our society. I think the Premier was right to correct me. He was right to say that we should reflect on this part of our history in a celebratory way.

I pay tribute to the Premier for his support for not only the Centenary of Anzac but also another key project for the people of New South Wales, which is the renovation of the War Memorial in Hyde Park. The member for Fairfield is acutely

aware of the renovation because he sat through as many committee meetings about it as I did. Other members may not be aware that the War Memorial in Hyde Park, built in the 1930s by public subscription, with support from State and Federal governments and the City of Sydney, was originally planned to include a water feature. That was to be part of the memorial to our World War I contingent. Unfortunately, the Great Depression came along and public subscriptions and taxpayer revenue dried up, so the War Memorial was never completed. It did not include the water feature that was originally planned for it.

Now, some 80 years later, as we commemorate the Centenary of Anzac, the War Memorial will be completed. On behalf of the veterans community and their families, I offer my sincere thanks to the Premier, to the Federal Government and, in particular, to the Treasurer, who made it easy for us to obtain \$18 million from the Government. I went to a number of meetings to make sure that everybody present knew that I believed this was one of the most significant infrastructure projects of this term of Parliament. I stand by that, even though I will enjoy the \$8 billion railway that will come through my electorate in a few years time. I believe the veterans community and their families deserve to see the completion of the War Memorial. I am delighted that so many new features will be included in the memorial. I am delighted that there will be a public space for reflection. I am delighted that there will be a library. I am delighted that there will be a contemporary artistic reflection of the symbols of the Anzac story that we hold so dear. I am delighted that there will be a place that will commemorate the often forgotten country towns and hamlets that offered up their sons, only for them to die on the battlefields of western France and Gallipoli. I am delighted that the memorial will form part of not only the story of the past but also the story of the future. It will show the nation what we have become: one that is committed to freedom, democracy and fair play.

The veterans community is thankful not just for the Premier's support for the memorial. His commitment to employing veterans in the New South Wales Government has attracted support and interest from around the country. Ministers from as far away as Western Australia are asking me how the Securing Our Veterans' Future policy will work. I pay tribute to my predecessor in this portfolio, Victor Dominello, and to the Premier for their commitment to the project. They know that, for all the bricks and mortar we lay down to remember our veterans, nothing is more important than the welfare of our veterans. The best way for us to secure our veterans' future is to give them a sense of worth. We all know that a sense of worth comes with a job. We all know that a sense of worth comes with a feeling of security, of self-determination. A sense of worth comes from making a positive contribution to our society. For that reason, I think the Premier's policy of employing veterans in the New South Wales Government will be remembered. He will always be well regarded for his commitment to our veterans and he will always be welcome in the veterans community.

But it is not just about the War Memorial, and it is not just about Securing Our Veterans' Future. To my mind—the Premier would probably be too embarrassed to boast about this, but I do not have his humility—the Premier's decision to bring the Cabinet meeting forward to six a.m. on the day that our servicemen were brought home, the day of the ramp ceremony at RAAF Base Richmond, shows what a decent man he is. Some of our Federal politicians were criticised for not turning up

for that ceremony. I note that Bill Shorten and Malcolm Turnbull have commented on that and I think it should be set aside. The key takeaway for our veterans community is the demonstration that our Premier knows how important that ramp ceremony was to the widows of those soldiers, to the families of those who never came home. It is one of the greatest military injustices since Breaker Morant that those families were denied the right to properly farewell their loved ones after they fell on the battlefield all those years ago. I am delighted that those in command of our military forces now realise that the least we can do for those who have fallen on overseas fields is to bring them home and give them full military honours as we lay them to rest.

In acknowledging the Centenary of Anzac, I think it is important to highlight that the Australian Defence Force has never actively sought conflict. The history of our nation—of which I think our military history is an important cornerstone—shows that we are a nation of democracy and peace. Our history tells us, and will say to those in the future, that we are a nation of peace and tranquillity; we are a nation that uses our military only to ensure stability and freedom. It is no coincidence that we boast not only this history of not initiating conflict but also a longstanding commitment to democracy. We are one of only very few nations that can boast a century of democracy. It is no coincidence that the short list of nations that can boast a century of democracy includes New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada—and we are four countries that also boast a commitment to constitutional monarchy. It is certainly one of the ingredients that allows us to ensure the stability of our military forces, and indeed this very parliamentary democracy that we stand in today.

In acknowledging the Anzac story and taking note of the centenary, I think it is important to reflect on the service given by members of this House. Indeed, one of the great privileges of serving in this House is to be able to pay tribute every day to the memorial to George Braund and Edward Larkin that stands before us—two serving members of this Chamber who thought so much of their community that they were prepared to lay down their lives in service to their nation. We should continue to celebrate those two gentlemen for their valour and their contribution to two great institutions, the New South Wales Parliament and the Australian Imperial Force.

But they are not the only two from this House who have served in our military on overseas operations over the course of the past century. When I worked in this place some 20 years ago Ian McManus was a member of the Government. Ian, whom you may remember, Mr Deputy Speaker George, was the Labor member for Bulli, so he is not someone whom I would usually be inclined to advocate for. But as a young man Ian served with the Royal Australian Navy. He won the United States Unit Commendation for his service during Operation Sea Dragon in the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War and also served, I understand, in the Malay Emergency. Ian was not the only one of course. Charlie Lynn, a former member of the Legislative Council, was a famous member of the Vietnam contingent. He continues to serve as an advocate for the memory of the Kokoda Trail and has a wonderful organisation that takes young people over that trail.

My former boss Peter Collins did his military service back-to-front. He served as a member of this place for more than 20 years and then, on his retirement from this place, went back to the permanent Navy and served in Iraq as part of the international operations to secure the peace and security of the people of Iraq. I think

that service should also be celebrated. These days we have Anthony Roberts, the member for Lane Cove, in Cabinet. As modest as he is about his military service, it should not be forgotten. Anthony served as a peacekeeper overseas. There are many such wonderful stories of service from this Chamber that I am delighted we can boast about as part of the commemoration of the Centenary of Anzac. Politicians around the world are often criticised as being the people who just send soldiers off to wars but never fight them. I think this House can proudly say we are not like that.

As part of the Centenary of Anzac, we should reflect on all who have served us, all who have served this nation. It is worth noting that that should include the more than 600 members of the Australian community who died fighting in the Boer War before the Anzac story even began. We should remember the 115,000 who were killed or wounded in the First World War, of whom 60,000 were killed; the 30,000 who were taken prisoner in the Second World War; the 39,000 who were killed in the Second World War; and the 3,600 who were killed or wounded in Vietnam, particularly the 518 who never returned home. That does not cover those injured or killed in Korea, in Afghanistan or in Iraq. These are not just statistics; these are families—and they need to be remembered.

I conclude by reminding the House that a number of wonderful scholarships are complementing the Centenary of Anzac. This year's recipients of the Premier's very own scholarship, which will continue to be awarded annually, travelled to battlefields in France. In previous years recipients had visited Long Tan, Korea and the European theatre. That scholarship program is run in partnership with Clubs NSW, which also runs the NSW Premier's Anzac Ambassadors program. As part of that program I was delighted, along with former Labor Premier the Hon. Nathan Rees and Anthony Ball from Clubs NSW, to take six students to Greece and the Western Front in April this year. These students were chosen, as many members will be aware, through a 1,000-word essay competition, and one of their obligations as members of the program was to report back to their communities.

As members know, I could go on forever about the Centenary of Anzac. It is something I think every member of this Chamber is passionate about, and I am delighted to see how many have embraced this aspect of our nation's history. I thank all those members who have invited me as Minister for Veterans Affairs to the various war memorials in their electorates, and I am delighted that the grants to improve those war memorials will continue. I ask the Chamber to take note of the Centenary of Anzac.