



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 14 April 1999

ANZAC DAY TRADING HOURS

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (6.03 p.m.): I move—

"That, in order to ensure the necessary amendments to and notifications of changes to Anzac Day trading hours for 1999 can occur (including Proclamation if the Bill is passed), full debate of the Liquor Amendment Bill 1999 be conducted on Wednesday evening, 14 April 1999."

I seek leave to move an amendment.

Leave granted.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'That' and insert—

'so much of Standing and Sessional Orders be suspended as would enable the Liquor Amendment Bill 1999 to pass all its remaining stages at this evening's sitting to ensure necessary amendments to and notification of changes to Anzac Day trading hours for 1999 can occur.'"

This amendment is intended only to clarify the intent of my original motion, which I believe was clear—at least in words—and that is that we deal with the Bill tonight to allow for implementation, if it is passed, prior to Anzac Day.

Very few opportunities are afforded to us to revisit an issue and review, from my perspective, our position on that issue. This evening, such an opportunity is made available. This current motion is merely the initial step to remedying a situation that is disappointing, unfair and offensive to the many men and women who contributed to our freedom in all theatres of war.

It could be said that we have already dealt with this matter. It could be said that this matter should be further deferred, and perhaps it would be more comfortable to defer debate until after 25 April 1999. These things could be said, but they should not. The public reaction after the previous motion was lost was clear: there was a great deal of disappointment that this Parliament would fail to take the part of returned servicemen and women and their families who are affected by the thoughtless behaviour of others.

Mother Theresa pointed out that the great tragedy of life is not hunger or disease but feeling unwanted. From some of the phone calls and letters that I received after our last debate on this issue, it seemed that many diggers and their families felt more than unwanted; they felt betrayed. The importance of the commemoration of Anzac Day, the critical need for the solemnity of the day to be retained and the important place that our returned diggers play in that ceremony should transcend any pettiness or unwillingness to have a change of mind on this issue.

I will read to members some of the reactions to our last deliberations—

"Community anger has arisen over the government's reluctance to force establishments selling alcohol to close at midnight."

In a letter to the editor, a writer says—

"That services to commemorate the memory of those who died in the defence of this country should be marred and disrupted by drunken yobbos, is in itself abhorrent and unAustralian.

What makes this even more disappointing is that the Queensland Labor Government could not even allow a conscience vote on such a sensitive issue as this, when recently, through a unanimous Labor vote, they defeated a motion to restrict hours of trading of licensed clubs on Anzac morning."

The Federal member for my area, Paul Neville, expressed his disappointment with his State parliamentary colleagues who voted against a motion to force clubs and pubs to close at midnight on Anzac Day. His comments are reported in an article in the Gladstone Observer. It states—

"The National Party, to a member ... supported this legislation on the floor of Parliament, as did the Liberal Party and all the independents, he said.

But not a single Labor member thought the solemn ANZAC Day dawn services across the state more important than a handful of drunken revellers.

...

He said the motion to close clubs early could have been carried with the vote of two Labor MPs."

Another resident in my area stated—

"Perhaps Mr Gibbs could be invited to this year's Anzac Day Dawn Service and see what it is like there. It has been going on for years now, they are not isolated incidents."

The Returned & Services League of Australia Mount Larcom branch stated that these efforts are strongly supported by the sub-branch. Another local writer to my office stated—

"We were disgusted at the way things went ... We trust you will continue to persist in bringing this matter to the Government of the day, so that people are reminded of this matter ... We feel a great sadness that all traditions and the honouring of our brave dead service men and women is becoming such a very troubled time instead of a time when all young people should be holding their heads high with pride."

Another fellow, who described himself as a colourful relic of the air wars in World War II, stated—

"Tourism minister Gibbs seems far removed from public viewpoint in his expressed attitude."

I would have to say that his letter was not vindictive—none of these were; they were expressions of disappointment and more over the result of the deliberations at our last sitting.

Another writer, who is not a local from my area but who comes from this area, stated—

"It is to be hoped that it is not too late to reverse this sad decision on what is really Australia's special day.

...

I might well ask, after this episode"—

which refers to the last vote that we took on this matter—

"what did the youngsters I went to school with, played sport with, entered the teenage years with, joined up with, and they never came back, die for????????"

...

Again, this is not a protest against you personally ... It is not too late to make amends. Are those who represent us man or woman enough to admit a huge error and correct it with a stroke of a pen?"

Once again, I express my gratitude to all servicemen and women in all arenas of conflict for their sacrifice. Anzac Day offers each of us an opportunity to both honour the memory of those who paid the ultimate price and to express our gratitude to returned servicemen and women for their ongoing sacrifice.

I have heard of an incident when a little girl lost her hair during chemotherapy treatment. When she came home from hospital, her mother and father had shaved their heads to celebrate the occasion. I read about a boy who also lost his hair in chemotherapy and all the boys in his class welcomed him back to school by shaving their heads, too. This kind of empathy speaks volumes to people.

Tonight, we can choose to acknowledge these individuals' commitment to our freedom, to acknowledge that considerations given last month to this matter may not have been thought through thoroughly and to agree to bring forward debate on the Liquor Amendment Bill to consider ways to

address community concerns relating to Anzac Day commemorations. If we are prepared to review this matter, it will speak volumes to our returned servicemen and women and their families of our appreciation for their incredible sacrifice.

Leaving it for another time will do only two things: it will telegraph to our community that we do not appreciate those involved in conflict, their sacrifice and the memories they must daily overcome, and it will also telegraph that even a poor decision, once made, remains unchallenged—that we would rather accept the wrong decision than admit a mistake and correct that decision.

Neither of those messages is acceptable. I believe that, when we last considered this issue of trading hours on Anzac Day, we made an incorrect decision. This motion is intended to be the first step in correcting that error, and I commend the motion to the House.
