



Speech By  
**Steve Minnikin**


**MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH**

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**MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**War in Afghanistan**

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (11.25 am): Last month marked the 12th anniversary of Operation Slipper, Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan. As Australian forces prepare to transfer responsibility for security to the Afghan National Army, I rise to reflect upon our nation's longest ongoing armed conflict and pay my respects to our country's dedicated military service personnel. September 11, 2001 was a day that forever changed our world. I recall watching the news breaking of the terror attacks on the United States of America and looking on, helplessly, as it became apparent that thousands of people would never be coming home. I think it is safe to say that the events of that day made all of us pull our loved ones a little closer and hold onto our children a little tighter. The terrorist atrocities committed that day took the lives of over 3,000 innocent people; people whose only crime was going into work or boarding an aeroplane. Then there were the emergency service personnel, many of whom perished as they worked tirelessly to find and assist victims of the attacks.

While those events were unfolding on the other side of the world, they resonated with people across the globe, representing an assault to the liberties and freedoms we hold so dear. American journalist and author Henry Mencken told us, 'We must be willing to pay a price for freedom'. That is just what Australia has done in the years since. On 14 September 2001, Australia invoked the ANZUS treaty for the first time since its instatement in 1952, pledging our nation's support for the United States' efforts to combat international terrorism. From initial deployment to Afghanistan in October 2001 through to mid-2002, Australia's armed forces played an integral role in deposing the Taliban regime and undertaking reconnaissance and surveillance activities. However, arguably the most difficult of the Australian Defence Force tasks in Afghanistan has been the counterinsurgency undertaken by the Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Urozgan province since 2006. While Australia's involvement in counterinsurgency has resulted in a steep increase in battlefield casualties, it is our soldiers' tireless work to mentor the Afghan National Army that has been the key to enabling Australia's withdrawal from Afghanistan and preparing to transfer security to the Afghan National Army.

Throughout their deployment in Afghanistan, Australian soldiers have displayed enormous courage in the face of extreme danger, none more so than Australia's Victoria Cross recipients, Trooper Mark Donaldson, Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith and Corporal Daniel Keighran. On 2 September 2008, Trooper Donaldson was travelling in a combined Australian, United States and Afghan convoy when they were ambushed by enemy forces. In the firefight that ensued, Trooper Donaldson exposed his position, drawing enemy fire away from the wounded troops. Corporal Roberts-Smith displayed similar courage in 2010 when, during a helicopter assault to capture a senior Taliban leader in the Kandahar province, the troops were set upon by machine gun fire from multiple

directions. Corporal Roberts-Smith drew enemy fire away from his injured comrades and towards himself, before ultimately storming the enemy's position and putting an end to the bloodshed. Those are but two examples of battlefield valour and I take this opportunity to recognise the efforts of all our soldiers for their courageous acts on the battlefield.

Unfortunately, there have also been great sacrifices, no more so than the loss of some of our nation's finest soldiers. A year ago, I rose in this very House to pay homage to Lance Corporal Stjepan Milosevic, a local husband and father who was killed in action. Unfortunately, his was not an isolated case. A total of forty Australian soldiers have been killed in the line of duty throughout the war in Afghanistan, including sixteen from Queensland. I honour each of them, including Trooper David Pearce, Private Benjamin Ranaudo, Sapper Jacob Daniel Moerland, Sapper Darren James Smith, Private Nathan Bewes, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Walter Kirby, Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, Lance Corporal Andrew Jones, Private Matthew Lambert, Captain Bryce Duffy, Corporal Ashley Birt, Lance Corporal Luke Gavin, Sapper James Thomas Martin, Private Robert Hugh Frederick Poate and Lance Corporal Stjepan Milosevic.

These soldiers have paid the ultimate price, sacrificing themselves for the rights and freedoms which we hold so dear and helping to fight the ever-important campaign against international terrorism. To these fallen soldiers and to the service men and women who have served and are currently serving in Afghanistan, I offer our nation's most solemn and heartfelt thanks and the promise that, in the immortal words of former United States President Ronald Reagan, 'We will always remember and we will always be proud.'

As the sun sets on our nation's presence in Afghanistan, no clear victory can be claimed, nor is there any finality to the war on terror. However, we do leave behind an Afghanistan which is undeniably stronger. It is with the utmost reverence and respect that I pay tribute to the efforts of our service men and women to the House.