




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Veterans

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (2.15 pm): Jesse Bird is an Afghanistan veteran, and on a cold Melbourne day he is in his apartment alone and at breaking point. After seven years battling post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Jesse pulled on his Army uniform, laid out his medals and ended his life. Around him were documents detailing his struggle with the department. The final insult was a letter rejecting his claim for support in relation to PTSD, depression and alcohol abuse. The department acknowledged that these conditions were caused by his military service, but they decided that they were not enough to merit the support that he needed. Unfortunately, Jesse's story is not unique. Today I will do two things: I will place on the record the struggles that many veterans face; and I will issue a call to arms for all politicians at all levels to do more than just remember the dead.

In my maiden speech I talked about my own struggles with PTSD, but my story is just one of many. I spoke of how the strength of those around me made me strong and kept me safe, but others are not so lucky. Stories filter through the veterans' community every single week of another young veteran who cannot take the pain any more. Veterans are sick and tired of watching the suffering of those who sacrificed to defend our nation. Veterans are sick and tired of a bureaucracy that makes them jump through hoops. Veterans need more from politicians than just laying wreaths on Anzac Day: they need politicians to use their power to build a safety net that will catch them all when they fall.

To help those veterans who are suffering we need more than just words, more than just gestures and more than just individual initiatives. We need root and branch reform of the way that we support veterans and their families. We need all parliaments—not just the one in Canberra—to lend a hand. We need to support service men and women as they make the difficult transition into civilian life, and we need better mental health and accommodation for those veterans who are doing it tough.

Jesse Bird's final resting place is in the ocean off the beach at Surfers Paradise. Tragically, not far from there on Anzac Day last week another digger, Bradley Carr, took his own life in a lonely Gold Coast hotel room. The stories keep coming but they must stop. The next time you silently listen to the haunting cries of the last post I urge all members to remember Jesse and Brad and reflect on what you will do to ensure their suffering is not repeated.