

THE COVENANT

Email sent to Kel Ryan from the Office of the Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs.
Received 27 August 2019, 11:22 am

OFFICIAL

Dear Kel

Thank you for your email to the Secretary. She has asked that I respond on her behalf.

You may be aware that the Bill passed through the Senate following debate on 29 July 2019 and was introduced into the House of Representatives on 30 July 2019. The Bill has not yet been debated in the House.

You can track the progress of the Bill at the following web address: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=s1206.

As you are aware, Senator Lambie introduced an amendment to the Bill in the Senate that in effect creates a commitment on the part of the Commonwealth to determining claims under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 within 90 days. You can access the text of Senator Lambie's amendment at the above web link.

In response to Senator Lambie's amendment, the Minister for Defence, Senator Reynolds advised the Senate that:

"I thank Senator Lambie for these amendments and I can advise that the government won't be opposing these amendments, but we do have grave concerns about the third amendment and the 90 days and Senator Lambie's rejection of clause that said 'except in exceptional circumstances', because there are circumstances—very complex cases—where these 90 days are not required. Of course, the government always wants as many of these as possible to be dealt with as expeditiously as possible."

Senator Reynolds went on to reiterate the very strong commitment of the Government to the Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant and stated that it was long overdue. She also said:

"The purpose of the covenant is to give a foundation to a cultural shift that we seek. That is a shift towards acknowledging our deep respect for those who serve and their sacrifice so that the rest of us can enjoy the freedoms we enjoy today. The covenant bill is subtle but also sophisticated in the way that it encourages us all to build a new mindset around current and ex serving personnel. The bill provides all Australians with the opportunity to see serving personnel and veterans in a new light. It answers some questions that I get often: how can we recognise the service of these men and women, and how can we do that individually?"

The full text of Senator Reynolds' statement is in the Hansard, and can be accessed at the following link:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansard_s/fa174555-9ffd-4f25-a889-514cfa0244f5/&sid=0000

It is not appropriate that I make any comment on the progress of the Bill in the House of Representatives at this point. But, I think you can be very certain of the Government's commitment to the Covenant based on Senator Reynolds' speech.

In addition, work is continuing on the full implementation of the Veterans' Recognition Program. Eligible clients can now apply and receive their Veterans' Card. Current card holders will receive their new look Veterans' Card as part of the global refresh, where DVA will automatically reissue all current card holders with their new look Veterans' Card. This is anticipated to occur by the end of the year. In the meantime, current card holders can use their existing cards. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Department are working together towards launching the Veterans' Recognition Program in the coming months.

Kind regards
Annie Xxxxxxx

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