



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

Illicit Drugs

SPEECH

Tuesday, 8 September 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui	Question No.

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (15:32): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Employment (Senator Abetz) to a question without notice asked by Senator Lambie today relating to policies concerning methamphetamines.

One of the criticisms levelled by supporters of this Abbott government at independent crossbench senators is that we fail to put forward positive suggestions. This, of course, is not true. Those accusations are just part of a clever political campaign to deflect attention from the obvious dysfunction and incompetence of the Abbott-Truss Liberal and National party government.

Today my questions to Senator Abetz were again positive suggestions regarding practical legislative solutions for the problem of ice addiction in our children. My offer to work cooperatively with the government to introduce these new and historic national laws to help and empower parents with ice-addicted children was genuine—because, as most of you in this chamber will know by my disclosures in here and in public, I am personally affected.

Before I turn to the detail of Senator Abetz's reply to my questions, it is important to note that during the 14 months I have been sitting in this Senate, I have put forward and spoken about many positive policy initiatives. And this hung parliament has produced genuine consultation not chaos—as the Murdoch-Liberal cheer squad would have Australia believe. The critics saying that a hung Senate creates chaos are just following the script Mr Murdoch wrote for the conservative party in England. But, as they are about to find out, when it comes to national leadership the Prime Minister is no David Cameron. Like other crossbench senators, in 14 months I have voted for many pieces of government legislation, amounting to billions of dollars which will benefit the best interests of Australia and my state of Tasmania.

On the question of whether this parliament should support legislation which allows non-consensual treatment for ice addicts or not, my community advisers have provided me with one statement which should end any argument against the merits of involuntary medical treatment: between 37 per cent and 61 per cent of amphetamine users end up in our jail system in Australia. Or, in other words, between 37 per cent and 61 per cent of ice users end up in a situation where they are forced into non-consensual detention without a guarantee of proper medical treatment.

So my simple point to those who oppose my legislation—and I acknowledge the possibility of government support—is this. If your loved one who is hooked on ice doesn't die or is not seriously injured or does not seriously harm some innocent on their journey to hell, it is more than likely that the state will take their liberty away from them when they are sentenced to jail. So would it not be better to take our children's liberty away from them at an early part of their self-destructive journey and save all the heartache, harm and expense and guarantee they will receive proper medical treatment?

When the cost of providing proper medical services for our ice-addicted is raised, the predictable question of 'where are you going to get the money for that?' is naturally going to be asked. Despite what Senator Abetz says, it is reasonable to question all government spending, including the cost of the military action in the Middle East.

The Tasmania government recently announced \$4.8 million over four years will provide us with 12 rehabilitation beds for Tasmania's north-west ice addicts. I have been informed that the true cost of delivering one bomb in a Middle East airstrike could be up to \$5 million. So, in other words, for each bomb dropped in Syria and Iraq by our RAAF our governments could deliver 12 new ice rehab beds. The Parliamentary Library has confirmed that the total number of Australian airstrikes for the latest Middle East war over a 12-month period to August this year is 119, with up to 447 individual bombs being dropped. At a minimum, the true cost of this military action will be \$595 million, and it could be as high as more than \$2 billion when you consider the cost of support aircraft, including refuelling tankers, air command aircraft, other support aircraft and aircrew rescue resources. The bottom line is that \$595 million would fund 1,428 rehab beds.

The cost of fighting terrorists in the Middle East should be met by the rich countries in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, for example—who make hundreds of billions of dollars in profits each year through oil, and not by Australian taxpayers, who have better and more urgent things to spend our public money on. Here is a positive suggestion: let's spend our money on rehab beds for Australia's ice addicted children, not on bombs in the Middle East.

Question agreed to.