

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

CONSIDERATION OF SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES
3 MAY 2000
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

DVA1

OUTCOME—All
Output Group 6

QUESTION—SERVICE CREDITS AND OUTAGES OF THE COMPUTER
SYSTEM

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard page 6)

Question

Have all the service credits for all the big outages that occurred some 12 months or more ago been agreed to by IBM?

Answer

Yes.

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DVA2

OUTCOME 1

Output

QUESTION—NET COST TO GOVERNMENT OF EXTENSION OF GOLD CARD TO VETERANS OVER 75 WITHOUT OVERSEAS SERVICE AND TO BRITISH AND ALLIED SERVICE PEOPLE

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard page 11)

Question

Can you take on notice the cost if the gold card was provided to all Second World War veterans who do not get it at the moment because they did not serve overseas but served in Australia, if that started operating from the age of 75 rather than 70? There may well be a cost to your department's budget in a gross figure but actually the net figure to the government may actually be less, because if you get the gold card there will be a reduction somewhere else in social security-- ...

Offsets elsewhere. So could you do the two figures so that it is clear in my mind what the net to the budget is for the government rather than the gross to veterans? And would you do that for British and allied service people?

Answer

The Senate Estimates process provides the opportunity for the Senate to assess the performance of the public service and its administration of current government policy and programmes. It is not a forum to develop new policy and it is suggested that a more appropriate mechanism to obtain a policy costing would be under the Charter of Budget Honesty Act 1998 where the Leader of the Opposition is provided with the opportunity to request, through the Prime Minister, that the Secretaries of the Departments of the Treasury and of Finance and Administration cost publicly announced policies during the caretaker period for a general election.”

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DVA3

OUTCOME 2

Output

QUESTION—DVA LETTER TO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REGARDING THE DEATH OF A VETERAN IN A NURSING HOME

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard pages 12 to 15)

Question

During the Senate Estimates Supplementary Hearings on 3 May 2000, a range of questions were asked and references made to a letter sent from DVA to the Department of Health & Aged Care regarding the deaths of veterans in a nursing home. Those questions have been consolidated as follows.

- 1. Can the Department provide a copy of the letter to the Committee?**
- 2. When was the letter sent?**
- 3. When did the veterans die?**
- 4. What subsequent advice has been received from the Department of Health & Aged Care?**
- 5. On how many other instances has the Department written to the Department of Health & Aged Care on issues such as this?**

Answer

- The letter could have medico-legal implications and it is considered that it would be inappropriate to put these details in the public domain. It is suggested that the letter be discussed with Senator Schacht privately.
- The letter was sent from the Secretary DVA to the Deputy Secretary Department of Health & Aged Care and not Secretary to Secretary as indicated during the Committee's hearing on 3 May 2000. The date of the letter was 9 March 2000.
- The letter referred to the deaths of two veterans. One died in October 1999 and the other in November 1999.
- The Secretary DVA was advised by telephone on 9 March 2000 that the Department of Health & Aged Care would refer the matter to the Queensland Police. We understand at the time of writing that the Department of Health and Aged care has received a response from the police and, following further inquiries, has concluded that there is no justification to proceed with further investigation. Local doctors have

been consulted and support the decision to take no further action. The management of Alchera has changed and the home is under the management of a director of nursing with an excellent reputation

5. There is no record or recollection of this Department having written in recent years to the Department of Health & Aged Care about other concerns of this nature.

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DVA4

OUTCOME 2

Output

QUESTION—POWERS TO ENSURE THAT THE BEST HEALTH CARE IS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT VETERANS WOULD EXPECT UNDER THE *VETERANS' ENTITLEMENT ACT 1986* ?

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard page 15)

Question

Do you think you have adequate powers to ensure that the health care of veterans in nursing homes can be dealt with in the department to ensure that the best care is given in accordance with what veterans would expect under the Veterans' Entitlements Act?

Answer

The *Aged Care Act 1997* and associated schedules are the authority for the operation and quality of care in Commonwealth funded nursing homes. Responsibility for matters covered by that Act rest within the Aged Care portfolio administered through the Department of Health and Aged Care. The Commonwealth subsidy in respect of members of the veteran community resident in nursing homes is charged to DVA through arrangements with the Department of Health and Aged Care.

DVA monitors closely any episodes of criticism or complaint about care provided in nursing homes. During the past 18 months a very small number of complaints relating to standards of aged care have been received by DVA. A complaints protocol has been established and each DVA State Office has the following procedures in place for dealing with complaints:

- the residential aged care facility might be contacted directly on the veteran's behalf or the veteran or family member will be assisted to deal directly with the facility to resolve the issue;
- when appropriate DVA staff refer veterans and their families to the DH&AC Complaints Resolution Scheme which has the power and resources to investigate complaints thoroughly;

- other options include reference to:
 - Veteran’s Local Medical Officer (LMO);
 - Local Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT);
 - DVA contracted social worker or the relevant Community Adviser;
 - Relevant advocacy services in the various States; and
 - Ex-service organisation welfare officers.

DVA staff follow a standard practice to ensure that veterans or their families are informed of their care choices and options, whether they are provided directly by DVA or through other agencies.

If the Department becomes aware of a more general concern from an individual or from the public about veterans being at risk in a facility, DVA staff liaise with staff of the Department of Health & Aged Care to investigate the concerns and address them.

There are around 18,500 veterans and war widows living in aged care facilities.

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DVA5

OUTCOME 3

Output

QUESTION—THE COST OF THE ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEDICATION OF THE KOREAN WAR MEMORIAL

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard page 17)

Question

Can you take on notice the breakdown of the expenditure and costs of all the activities that the government funded related to the dedication of the Korean War Memorial, not just the memorial itself but the cocktail party the night before and other activities of attendance at various functions that the Korean veterans had? ... Could you break down the cost the government contributed?

Answer

Funding provided through the Department of Veterans' Affairs towards the cost of the Australian National Korean War Memorial is as follows:

• Memorial construction	\$700,000
• Printing and publications	\$22,925
• National Reunion cocktail party	\$40,425
• ABC live telecast of dedication ceremony	\$23,000
• Miscellaneous	\$1,736
Total	<u>\$788,086</u>

Departmental staff provided substantial in-kind support to the Memorial Management Committee throughout the project.

Federal Government assistance was provided also by the Australian War Memorial, Department of Defence and National Capital Authority.

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DVA6

OUTCOME 3

Output

QUESTION—THE COST OF THE SERVICES AT GALLIPOLI

SENATOR SCHACHT (Hansard page 18)

Question

Could you provide, on notice, the cost of the provision of the services et cetera at Gallipoli this year?

Answer

The Department of Veterans' Affairs expenditure was as follows:

● Anzac Commemorative Site	\$1,401,862.16
– construction, development and preparation	
● ABC live national telecast	\$123,000.00
● Ship accommodation (net cost)	\$64,979.80
● Publications, including freight	\$67,187.60
● Official guests fares and accommodation	\$8,854.60
● Staff fares and accommodation	\$26,435.22
Total	<u>\$1,692,319.38</u>

The New Zealand Government contributed \$250,000 towards the cost of the project.

Federal Government assistance was provided also by the Department of Defence and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.