



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**Australian Citizenship Amendment  
(Defence Families) Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 23 August 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 23 August 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Fawcett, Sen David

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia) (13:28): I rise to also address and support the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Defence Families) Bill 2002. I wish to address, firstly, the value it brings to defence and, secondly, the politics of it. On the value it brings to defence, I talk as somebody who has spent nearly 30 years in the defence organisation as a regular serviceman, reserve and contractor. Very soon the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee will be tabling an inquiry into defence procurement. One of the consistent themes the committee heard during that inquiry is the fact that we need skilled people in the ADF to assist with the acquisition and operation of equipment. Those skills do not come easily. You cannot just put somebody through a TAFE course or a university course, give them a qualification and say they are skilled. Competence is a combination of skills and relevant experience.

One of the really valuable things that lateral recruits bring to the Australian defence organisation is competence. In my own area of aerospace, I can look at a number of people who have come as operational pilots, weapons systems officers, or particularly experimental test pilots from the flight test world. The kinds of skills and experience that those people bring literally cost millions of dollars and a number of years for the Australian Defence Force to obtain. They also bring the perspective of another service, another way of doing things, to provide context and checks and balances to help our Defence Force reach best practice.

The fact that we invited people to come here and to serve—in some cases, put their lives on the line; in many cases, serve and provide technical advice in our Defence Force—means that we should also be looking after their families. The cost of doing so is minuscule in comparison with the first order value they bring through their competence and the second order value they bring by filling a gap—therefore, fewer failures in our projects, more efficiency in our projects and operational capability, and not needing to train other people to do the task. This does not relieve the government and the services of the obligation to provide adequate funding for the training of our people. It does not relieve the defence organisation of the obligation to consider not just qualifications but competence and competence that is specific to the task in question. It provides us with another avenue to obtain the skills, the competence and the experience

that we need to make sure that our Defence Force is effective and efficient.

The cost of supporting families is minuscule in comparison. It is also a moral obligation. If we are expecting somebody to up-stumps and come here, whether it be from Canada, the United States, the UK or other parts of the world, it is not fair to then expect that their families will not receive the support that other service people's families receive. We have a moral obligation and a duty of care to that person. If his or her mind is going to be fully on the job, they need to have the same certainty that their families will receive the care that they need to be fully functioning members of our community. The bill before us today finally goes towards making that a possibility.

I will quickly address the politics of it. Former speakers have mentioned, and I will mention again, that the coalition saw this gap, took action and put forward a bill to address this. Given that the government have now put in a practically identical bill to address the issue, one has to ask: on what grounds—what logical grounds, what moral grounds, what grounds at all—could they have voted down the coalition's bill that would achieve the same purpose? One can only be left with the conclusion that it was political. Given that we are talking yet again about the effectiveness of our Defence Force, a national security issue about the duty of care and the loyalty that we owe to the people who serve us, to put off a measure like this for purely political reasons is really dealing in the gutter. Again, it is not moral, fair or effective to allow issues like this to be dealt with on the basis of politics as opposed to the real issues at hand. I am happy to support the bill. I am disappointed that the government was not prepared to support the coalition's bill which was delivered in a spirit of meeting a real need for our Defence Force service men and women and their families. I commend the bill to the Senate.