



As we look ahead we all know that there will be an election sometime in the second half of this year. Elections are a time to take stock of the performance of the Government and the Opposition. And also to evaluate the promises and commitments of both sides of politics.

Although many issues are of concern to the wider electorate, there are matters that are of particular concern to the Veterans' community. Labor hopes that we will be able to canvass many of those issues through publications like this.

The detailed policy of both sides of politics won't be released until much closer to the likely election date, but that doesn't mean that points of view can't be put or positions debated and critically evaluated. Labor is committed to ensuring a wide ranging discussion about issues in the Veterans' affairs area and to progressively releasing positions for examination in the public arena.

After more than a decade in power there remains a number of outstanding problems that the Government has failed to address. Many of these problems deserve to be dealt with.

**Alan Griffin MP**  
**Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs**  
**Federal Member for Bruce**  
 Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600  
 Phone: (02) 6277 4374  
 Email: alan.griffin.mp@aph.gov.au

## Veterans' Affairs Website Launched



A new website has been designed to keep Veterans informed about important issues happening in their community.

The site, by Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin, will offer copies of Alan's speeches, newsletters, press releases, information kits and details about Senate Estimates.

Links to a series of state and federal government sites as well as ex-service organisations and other areas of interest have also been featured.

The website, found at [www.griffinmp.com](http://www.griffinmp.com), will not only include information about Veterans' Affairs, but also his other portfolios – Defence Science and Personnel and Special Minister of State – and

information relevant to his local electorate of Bruce.

By reading the speeches, newsletters and media releases on the site, veterans will be able to keep track of the development of Labor's policy.

Labor believes it is important to provide the Veterans' community with an alternative, informative and up-to-date website that not only provides information about what Labor is doing but can also be used as a reliable source of information for the community.

Specific questions can be asked of Alan via the website.

Please register your email address on the site to be kept regularly updated with copies of speeches, media releases and newsletters from Alan.

# Smart Card Introduced

**The Government recently introduced its proposed health and social services access card into Parliament. Under the proposal an access card will be needed by 2010 to obtain any Commonwealth benefits, including Medicare, PBS subsidised pharmaceuticals, social security payments and Veterans' entitlements.**

Labor supports the use of smartcard technology but has three main concerns regarding this proposal: the accuracy, security and privacy of data to be stored on the card and the database which supports it; the registration process and the undue administrative burdens that will be introduced; and the cost of implementing and manufacturing the card.

Professor Allan Fels, the former Chairman of the ACCC, was commissioned by the Government to provide an independent report on the privacy aspects of the card. Fels additionally raised concerns relating to the unique identifying number and electronic signature, and recommended that these features not be displayed as it placed an unnecessary risk to people's security. The government has ignored his recommendation. Concerns were even raised by some of the Coalitions' own MPs.

Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, in a recent speech to Parliament, outlined Labor's concerns about the impact these changes will have on the Veterans' community.

## Privacy

Veterans may choose to have their health information stored on the public section of their card because in a medical emergency they may not be conscious or able to remember or state their PIN. It is therefore likely that medical information will be available to anyone with a simple card reader.

Alan Griffin said he was not sure that the veterans' community would appreciate the possibility of their medical conditions being available to strangers. Many veterans and war widows have sensitive medical issues and the last thing they need to worry about is having their privacy invaded.

## Applying

Under the proposal all Australians needing to access this card will have to undergo an interview process. Many veterans and war widows have already engaged in lengthy and sometimes stressful application processes for their current entitlements and as such are in a special position. To have them subject to another interview and registration process to get a card they are already entitled to seems unreasonable.

Veterans will have to go through the hassle yet again of collecting copies of forms and information to provide to the bureaucracy. In some cases this could cause them financial hardship as they may have to pay to obtain copies of original birth or marriage certificates.



*Photo courtesy of Office of Access Card.*

## The Cost

The Government in an extraordinarily arrogant move is refusing to release any details of the cost/benefit analysis of this card. They have argued that the card will save money by reducing fraud but can produce no evidence of figures on this.

We do know that the card already has a budget of \$1.3 billion dollars, a budget that quite possibly will grow rapidly. The great fear is that growing costs could mean that Departments such as Centrelink, Medicare or even Veterans' Affairs will be required to shoulder some of these costs which could mean possible cuts to existing services. This would be completely unacceptable.

## Status

Labor welcomed the Government's decision of appropriate recognition of a veterans' status on these cards. For example, gold card holders will be presented with a gold card and TPI, EDA and war widows pension recipients are able to also have their status reflected. This is very important to the Veterans' community.

However Labor believes that this bill is not good for the veterans' community in its current form. It gives the Veterans' community a card that has real privacy and security concerns, a costly and burdensome registration process and has yet another long bureaucratic process.



*Graham Edwards, Labor MP.*

## Edwards calls on Nelson to Apologise to Veterans

Labor MP and Vietnam Veteran, Graham Edwards has called on Defence Minister Dr Brendan Nelson to apologise for his comments comparing the current 'war on terror' to the battles on the Kokoda Track during World War II.

Speaking at a defence conference, Dr Nelson said "we had a gripping struggle on Kokoda Track, the battle of Insurava and the repulsion of the Japanese in Milne Bay. Today we face something which is no less of a risk to our culture, our values, our freedoms and way of life than was presented to us in 1942."

In response to Labor's call for an apology, Dr Nelson claimed in Parliament that he had not made a "military" comparison between Iraq and Kokoda in his speech and refused to apologise.

Mr Edwards later said the group of Australians and their families who have been written into the military lore of this nation deserved an apology.

## Labor Moves to Protect Kokoda Track



*Labor Leader Kevin Rudd and his son Nicholas on the Kokoda Track in April last year. Photo from Private Collection*

Federal Labor leader Kevin Rudd recently announced that an elected Labor Government would campaign at the United Nations to place the Kokoda Track on UNESCO's official world heritage list, ensuring its protection for future generations.

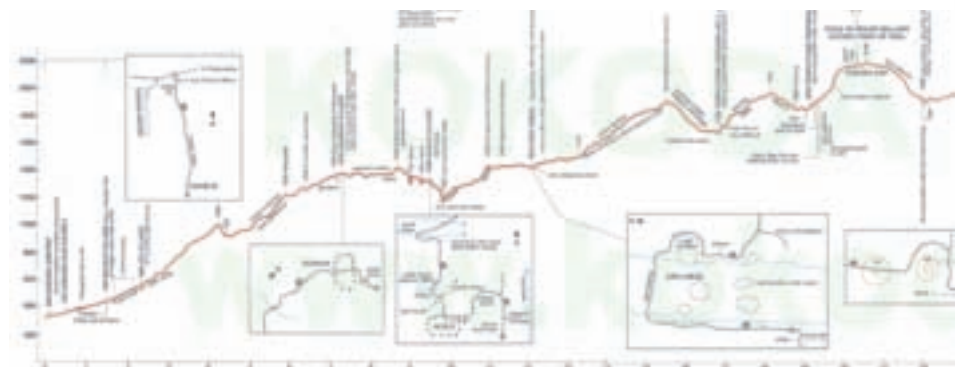
The Liberal Government has a poor record of protecting the Kokoda Track and, after the heartfelt and national outcry about mining exploration near the track, Federal Labor wants to ensure this site is never under threat again.

There is no doubt that the Kokoda Track has a strong resonance with

veterans, their families and the wider community and was a crucial part of our survival during World War II.

Labor has committed to working with the Papua New Guinea Government to provide the best long term protection for this site, ensuring people all over the world can continue to visit and reflect on the bravery of the young men and women who fought on the track.

The ex-servicemen and women of this country and their families deserve nothing less.



# Senate Estimates

**Senate Estimates gives Labor one of the few opportunities it has to question the Department in detail about the administration of the Veterans' Affairs portfolio and the operation of Government policy. Estimates only takes place on three occasions over the year and is limited in the amount of time allocated to question the Department.**

## Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study

In response to questions at the last two Senate Estimates it appears the families of Vietnam Veterans' face yet another hurdle. The Government is refusing to say that a study into Children of Vietnam Veterans is guaranteed.

Veterans' Affairs Department Secretary Mark Sullivan said: "We are expending this money in the hope and expectation that the CMVH will provide us with some methodologies and advice which will help – through the Minister – the Government to determine whether it can conduct such a study".

It is important to point out that never before have so many preliminary studies been required before a Government will commit to a full study. There should be no reason why the Government can not commit. The Feasibility study has clearly stated that a full study could proceed.

Labor has called on the Minister to immediately guarantee this study be undertaken

## War Memorials



*The Australian Memorial at La Hamel which now needs to be reconstructed due to extensive damage.*

*Photo Courtesy <http://bamelfriends.free.fr/start.html>*

At least half of Australia's major overseas War Memorials either completely need replacement or have significant damage and are in need of repairs.

The Department has revealed that even after \$9 million was spent on the Australian War Memorial in London there are still leakages that need to be repaired.

The Australian Corp Memorial at Le Hamel also needs to be totally rebuilt after substantial deterioration. Labor hopes this will not jeopardise plans for other memorials on the Western Front.

Repairs are also needed on the Sandakan and Fromelles Memorial and Parks, and the Hellenic Memorial in Crete.

## F-111 Reseal Deseal

After a long battle with the F-111 Deseal Reseal Support group, the Government has finally announced that health care will continue indefinitely for participants under the Study of Health Outcomes in Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP) Health Care Scheme.

While this announcement is welcome, Labor is still concerned the problems relating to claims for ex-gratia payment. A large number of claimants have had their claims previously rejected and their concerns have still not been addressed. At Senate Estimates Labor asked the Department for the latest figures for claims relating to the number that had been rejected. Surprisingly, the Department were unable to provide an answer on the night.

Labor will continue to question the Government as to why so many claims have been rejected.



*Photo courtesy Department of Defence*

## Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

A recent article by the Australian newspaper has revealed a growing number of claims for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially from those who have recently served in an overseas conflict.

It reported that more than 2,760 Veterans have successfully claimed PTSD in the past three years, and that after more than 60 years since the end of World War II claims for PTSD are still emerging, with 726 successful claims being made by Australia's oldest Veterans between 2004 and 2006.

Alexander McFarlane, a PTSD expert, was quoted as saying that "significantly more" claims would emerge because of Australia's high tempo of military operations. It is evident from the number of World War II Veterans submitting claims that PTSD can often emerge long after the events that caused the harm.

Labor was therefore disappointed at Senate Estimates that the Department did not come briefed on this issue. When the Department was questioned they were unable to confirm or deny the figures quoted in the article.

Mental health is a very serious issue for the Veterans' community, and we know it is a growing problem that can have lasting implications for Veterans and their families. The Howard Government must ensure mental health is given much higher priority and that new and innovative programs are established to assist those Veterans most in need.

## Anzac Cove

It was revealed at Senate Estimates that problems still remain at ANZAC Cove.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs confirmed it is likely further engineering and construction work will be announced by the Turkish Government to repair the damage at the cove.

It has also been confirmed that there is evidence to suggest human remains were uncovered in the original roadworks, undertaken two years ago.

Previous work at ANZAC Cove was a complete shambles and demonstrated the Government's inability to handle important projects like this. Labor will ensure the Government is kept to account in protecting this site and ensuring no further damage is done

## Iraq and Afghanistan



*Photo courtesy Department of Defence*

Labor is concerned by recent reports that there have been at least 174 Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who have been granted pensions for mental and physical injuries. At Senate Estimates the Department of Veterans' Affairs was asked to provide the total number of claims received as a result of conflicts in Iraq and Operation

Catalyst. The Department has given an undertaking to provide an answer as soon as possible.

The human and financial costs of these conflicts are concerning to the Labor Party and we remain particularly concerned for the situation of younger Veterans. We understand with new conflicts there will be new and emerging issues arising that have not been faced before. Labor will be working hard to ensure these new issues and claims are addressed in a timely manner.

## Gold card

Labor is pleased with the advice received from the Department of Veterans' Affairs at Senate Estimates. They have reported a positive response from medical specialists who have now resumed service for Veterans with the Gold Card.

While the response from medical specialists is pleasing, Labor has had some concerns raised about the availability of medical specialists for eligible Veterans' in Tasmania and Central Queensland. Labor will be monitoring the implementation to ensure that Veterans have access to the services they need.

Full transcripts and further information about the Senate Estimates hearing can be found on Alan Griffin's website at [www.griffinmp.com](http://www.griffinmp.com). Select Veterans' Affairs on the main menu and then click on the Senate Estimates link.

# Veterans Home Care Program

Last year the Department of Veterans' Affairs undertook a nationwide tender process for the delivery of Veterans' Home Care Services, a program that provides a range of care services including personal and respite care for more than 70,000 veterans and war widows. This was the first time such a review has occurred since the start of the program in 2001.

Labor expressed concern about the way the tender process was conducted, specifically the lack of consultation with the Veterans' community. It is understood that most Veterans first heard of a change in their providers, and therefore their carers, via a letter from the Department over the Christmas period.

Alan Griffin, the Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs raised these concerns in Parliament and said that the Government should have understood that these changes would cause understandable stress and anxiety to the Veterans' community. In this case the Government has failed to acknowledge the importance of the relationship that often exists between Veterans and their carers.

Labor will continue to monitor the implementation of these changes.

# Government Reviews Chaplaincy Services in South Australia



*From left to right – Mr Ray Buttery, Ms Margaret Brady, Labor Senator Anne McEwen, Mr Robert Fothergill at the Repat General Hospitals Chapel in Daw Park.*

The Department of Veterans' Affairs recently commenced a review of Chaplaincy Services for Veterans in South Australia without any formal Church representation on the review panel.

While the Heads of Christian Churches Committee currently provides funding for Chaplaincy positions at the Repat Hospital at Daw Park, it has not been included as a formal member of the review. This is despite numerous requests to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

Alan Griffin, Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Anne McEwen, Labor Senator for South Australia recently toured the facilities at the Repat Hospital and met with local veterans and the Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services, Rev Bruce Stocks to listen to their concerns about the review.

Chaplaincy Services play a crucial role in the rehabilitation of Veterans and their families. The Repat's pastoral care team provides pastoral

visits to patients and their families whose lives are often in crisis and need support to get them through a difficult time. This view was reiterated at the meeting by one of the Veterans who said that she would not have been able to cope with the pressures placed on her without the support of this important service.

Labor strongly opposes any reduction in services – especially given the unique rehabilitation and mental health challenges that are often faced by our Veterans – and has urged the Minister to publicly commit that he will not use the review as an excuse to reduce Federal funding for this important service.

## Department of Veterans' Affairs Claim Processing Blows Out

New figures from the Department of Veterans' Affairs revealed last financial year 4,570 claims exceeded the average time usually taken to process.

Veterans and their families are often faced with a difficult time when dealing with the claims process, are often not well and at their most vulnerable. A blowout in the time taken to process their claim only adds unnecessary pressure.

The Department's own Annual Report shows that, in some cases, claims have blown out by as much as 400 per cent – from 26 days to 130 days. Labor understands sometimes there can be difficult cases, and the details of the claim can be hard to resolve, but the Government should be doing more to address this situation.

It was revealed the Howard Government has forced the

Department, over the last two financial years, to implement a net national reduction of 12.5 per cent in staff allocated to compensation claims processed under the Veterans' Entitlement Act.

Labor has made its position clear – the Minister should not be cutting staff or resources when the Department is failing to meet their current obligations.

## 65th Anniversary of Bombing of Darwin



*Northern Territory Chief Minister, Hon Clare Martin MLA reflecting at Darwin's Cenotaph for the 65th Anniversary of Bombing of Darwin.*

**February 19 marked the 65th Anniversary of the bombing of Darwin.**

On that day in 1942 Darwin suffered devastating bombing raids which killed at least 243 people and wounded hundreds more.

The first 40 minute raid devastated the town, demolishing eight ships - including the destroyer USS Peary - and all but one of Darwin's warplanes.

Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Government, Claire Martin, represented the Labor Party at this year's official ceremony where Veterans', their families and other dignitaries laid wreaths on Darwin's Cenotaph on the Esplanade, overlooking Darwin Harbour.

Tributes were paid in honour of the commitment and dedication of those who fought to defend our country.

# Opening of the National Vietnam Veterans Museum

**The National Vietnam Veterans Museum on Phillip Island was officially opened by the Victorian Premier, Hon Steve Bracks on 9 March 2007.**

The Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin was one of over 1,000 people attending the official ceremony including Vietnam Veterans, their families and representatives from the ex-service community.

The museum has had a long and proud history that evolved from a trailer full of odd and ends personal memorabilia which travelled across Australia towed by John Methven and his wife Krishna's Landrover promoting the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia along the way. It has now evolved into a permanent museum located on a 1 and 1/4 acre block next to the

Phillip Island airstrip. It houses displays of a wide collection of artefacts, military hardware and memorabilia from the war, a library with comprehensive resources relating to the Vietnam War and a Remembrance Memorial constructed around a replica of the Long Tan Cross.

A substantial amount of funding for this project came from the Vietnam Veterans community and they should be congratulated for their efforts, with the remaining funds coming from local, state and federal governments.

This museum belongs to all Vietnam Veterans and pays tribute to all those who served in Vietnam. The Museum is open to the public 7 days a week and can be contacted on 03 5956 6400 or via email [vvmuseum@nex.net.au](mailto:vvmuseum@nex.net.au).



*Opening of the National Vietnam Veterans Museum. Photo from private collection.*



*Paul Copeland and Alan Griffin at the Torquay RSL's Memorial.*

## Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association

Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, recently attended the Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans Association National Conference and inspected the memorial plaque at the Torquay RSL in Victoria. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Australian Peacekeeping.

### *Invitations*

The Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs regularly attends and speaks at Veterans' conferences, commemorations and meetings.

If you would like Alan Griffin to attend and/or speak at one of your functions please forward details to the Office of Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 or contact Alan at [www.griffinmp.com](http://www.griffinmp.com).