

Don't shoot the messenger: advertise with it.

Stephen Byron, Managing Director, Canberra Airport

The campaign to have Defence Industry advertising removed from Canberra Airport is missing its target. Denying legitimate businesses the right to advertise (here or anywhere else) will do absolutely nothing to prevent wars and armed conflict around the globe.

Moreover, the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, on the frontline in those conflicts where Australia is involved, ought to have the very best equipment available to them. Defence industry is critical to achieving that; and not just a few big players, but the dozens of smaller, innovative businesses that support them.

As the nation's capital, Canberra is home to many of Australia's national defence and security institutions, organisations and industries. Thousands of people work in the sector. It is a vital contributor to employment and the local economy and the driver for innovation and invention. It makes sense for the ACT Government to be trying to grow the local economy by attracting firms that work in defence or associated industries because it is good business for Canberra, and our city is an incubator for new ideas and businesses that will deliver export dollars to our region. By way of example, Canberra is becoming a global hothouse of radar ingenuity: just this week we saw IE Asia-Pacific win an Export Award for small business; and home-grown CEA Technologies is a world leader in radar and communications solutions.

Targeting only Canberra Airport, and not Fairfax, or Yaffa, or Qantas, or YouTube, to name a fraction of the outlets which carry defence industry advertising, is a curious tactic.

Since we won't be retreating from our position on accepting defence industry advertising (or any other advertising that is acceptable weighed against the benchmark of generally prevailing community standards), we suggest a better use of resources for those who campaign against war would be to put up their own advertising. They could crowd source funding for their advertising from the people who have supported their petition.

Since the Commonwealth announced in 1998 that a local bid was successful in acquiring Canberra Airport, the Snow family has invested more than \$2 billion transforming it. So, instead of a dingy tin shed in a sheep paddock which was the 'welcome' to visitors as recently as five years ago, now they are greeted by an airy, light-filled, multi-award winning facility. From the world-first sculpture of giant kangaroos next to the runway, to Ante Dabro's *Introspection* bronze figures sitting alongside passengers in the gate lounge, to the majestic *Perception and Reality* by Andrew Rogers that graces the beautifully landscaped, floor-to-ceiling vista from the arrivals hall, to name just a few highlights, there is much to surprise and delight visitors to Canberra Airport.

Our social commitment to the Canberra region is no better demonstrated than through the Snow Foundation which focusses particularly on health, social welfare, education and employment for people who are marginalised, including refugees. This year we were pleased to support 61 community organisations and 44 individuals with funding of more than \$1.4 million. We constantly seek to maximise the social impact of our contribution, and to be the catalyst for greater change than a single person, organisation or donor could generate alone.

While we might disagree (strongly) with their opinions about the décor of the arrivals hall at Canberra Airport, we accept their right to express them. But that principle swings both ways. Defence industry has as much right to promote its services as anyone has to campaign against them.

As a fundamental principle of a democratic society, free speech should not become a casualty. That was an important tenet of Canberra Airport's recent campaign in support of marriage equality.

We are a vibrant and diverse capital, and that goes hand in hand with entertaining vibrant debate and a diversity of views. Most fair-minded Australians would happily support the promotion of peace and the prevention of nuclear war. But this campaign against Canberra Airport is unrealistic and unreasonable: unrealistic because it denies the important role of Defence Industry in equipping Australians working in conflict zones, and as a major employer and economic driver in Canberra; and unreasonable, because it targets only Canberra Airport (not other advertising channels) and seeks to deny the right of legitimate businesses (with an opposing position) to have their say.

So, let's see a level playing field. If this is a genuine campaign not designed to shore up the political fortunes of one Senate candidate, then bring on the advertising at Canberra Airport. We welcome it.