

Thursday, February 16, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

≡ All the news ▼

HOME THE NATION WORLD BUSINESS COMMENTARY SPORT ARTS All

🔍 Search

HOME / NATION







# Victorian Liberal senator David Van's non-authorized trip to Ukraine paid for by drone maker



David Van with the 80th Brigade in front of an Australian Bushmaster somewhere in the Donbas region during his August trip. Picture: David Van

**EXCLUSIVE**  
 By ELLEN WHINNETT  
 ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Follow @ellenwhinnett

6:33AM FEBRUARY 13, 2023 • 123 COMMENTS

An Australian senator who defied official government advice not to travel to war-torn Ukraine embarked on a frontline trip paid for by a drone company that had previously received millions of dollars in government grants.

Victorian Liberal senator David Van flew to Ukraine last year courtesy of defence manufacturing company DefendTex, and took photographs of tanks, Australian Bushmaster armoured vehicles, bombed-out buildings and bullet-riddled cars.

The trip raised eyebrows among his colleagues because it took place after the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had issued a do-not-travel warning for the country.

READ NEXT

A month after he returned to Australia from his August 2022 trip, Senator Van spruiked DefendTex and its drones in a speech to the Senate, without mentioning the company had paid for his trip.



Senator Van takes a selfie with a tank during his Ukraine sojourn last year.

He told the Senate he had travelled “not just to Kyiv for a photo-op but into the theatre of operations in Donbas”, and that he believed Australia needed to do more to support the war effort.

“We should be sending M777 howitzers and the 155mm ammunition that’s fired from them, as well as high-technology weapons such as the DefendTex drones that we’ve sent in there, and the DroneShield air defence system – all made in Australia,” he said.

**READ MORE:** [How Australia's bushmasters are helping Ukraine to 'victory' | '1 misbehaved': Fresh blow-up in Senate](#) | [Australia's role in Ukraine's 'miracle'](#)

He also posted on his personal website a number of photographs of himself wearing a bulletproof vest in Ukraine.

In two photographs, captioned “frontline”, he is joined by DefendTex chief executive Travis Reddy, though Senator Van does not name him.

While he was in Ukraine, it was revealed DefendTex had sold 300 of its small kamikaze D40 drones to the Ukrainian government.

The trip came three years after Senator Van and then defence industry minister Melissa Price announced a \$2m innovation grant to DefendTex, which was acknowledged at a function attended by the two MPs, Mr Reddy, and the company’s staff.



Former Defence Industry Minister Melissa Price and Senator David Van announcing a \$2 million grant to Defendtex CEO Travis Reddy in August 2019.

Former industry minister Christian Porter awarded the company another \$3m as a research grant in September 2021 to develop Australia's first 3D-printed rocket booster for space.

In April 2022, the Coalition announced a \$4.3m grant to the company to manufacture drones and missiles, taking to \$9.3m the total received in three years.

Senator Van declared in his register of interests that DefendTex Ltd had paid for his travel to Ukraine in August 2022.

The chairman of the Parliamentary Friends of Ukraine committee in Canberra, Senator Van told The Australian that he had been keen to travel to Ukraine to see how the drones were being used in the field, and to have discussions about further Australian support for Ukraine, which is fending off an invasion by Russia.

He said he had got to know the DefendTex team over several years, and encouraged its innovation and sovereign capacity.

---

Sky News host Peta Credlin says sending more Bushmasters to Ukraine is a "no-brainer" and sends a strong... signal of Australia's continuing support for global freedom. "We often forget ... Australia is one of just six countries in the entire world that went through the whole of the 20th ... [More](#)

"When I suggested I was looking to go, they said they could pay for the trip," he said. "It worked out very well. It was a very worthwhile trip. It was an important trip to do and they funded it – I've been open about that.

"Having put it on my register, I think I've done everything I need to."

Senator Van said the first time he met Mr Reddy was at the DefendTex event with Ms Price, when she handed over the grant cheque.

Mr Reddy also said this was the first time he had met Senator Van, and he had got to know him through the senator's keen interest in the company's work and in defence issues.

"We stayed in touch, as I do with all members of parliament," he said.

Mr Reddy said DefendTex got the opportunity to supply DI55 and D40 drones to Ukraine. "We got to know the Ukrainian ambassador in Australia; Senator Van facilitated some introduction to the ambassador, which was good," he said.

"Senator Van had an invitation to go to Ukraine. I wanted to go to Ukraine to see how the equipment was performing in the field.

"There was an opportunity."



Then newbie senator David Van makes his maiden speech in 2019. Picture: AAP Image/Mick Tsikas

Mr Reddy said he was more easily able to get access to Ukrainian ministers by travelling with Senator Van.

"I make body armour so I was able to provide an escort, to escort him to Ukraine, so that's what I did.

“He has a very keen interest in defence.

“He is trying to ensure the Australian people are supporting the liberal democracy in Ukraine.”

**ELLEN WHINNETT, ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Ellen Whinnett is The Australian's associate editor. She is a dual Walkley Award-winning journalist and best-selling author, with a specific interest in national security, investigations and features. She is a form... [Read more](#)



**Share this article**



**Topics**

[Russia-Ukraine War](#)

READ NEXT

123 COMMENTS

You can now update the display or screen name associated with your Subscriber account. [Click here for details and guidelines.](#)

Reader comments on this site are moderated before publication to promote lively, but civil and respectful debate. We encourage your comments but submitting one does not guarantee publication. You can read our comment guidelines [here](#). If you believe a comment has been rejected in error, email [comments@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:comments@theaustralian.com.au) and we'll investigate. **Please ensure you include the email address you use to log in so we can locate your comment.**

**Hi David**

[COMMENTS](#)

[MY PROFILE](#)



A NOTE ABOUT RELEVANT ADVERTISING: We collect information about the content (including ads) you use across this site and use it to make both advertising and content more relevant to you on our network and other sites. This is also known as Online Behavioural Advertising. You can [find out more about our policy and your choices, including how to opt-out here](#).

## More from *The Australian*

[Back to top ^](#)

### OUR PRODUCTS

[The Australian app on iOS](#)

[The Australian app on Android](#)

[The Australian Wine](#)

[Chinese site](#)

[Mind Games](#)

[Today's paper](#)

[All topics](#)

### TERMS OF USE

[Standards of Practice](#)

[Editorial code of conduct](#)

[Subscription terms](#)

[Group subscription terms](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Relevant Ads Opt-out](#)

[Cookie Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

### CONTACT US

[Subscription Help](#)

[Support](#)

[Contact info](#)

[Photo Sales](#)

### ABOUT US

[About The Australian](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[Our journalists](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[News archive](#)

[The Australian Plus member benefits](#)

[Copyright & Licensing](#)

[Sign up to Newsletters](#)

Copyright Nationwide News Pty Ltd. All times AEST (GMT +10:00)

Powered by [WordPress.com](#) VIP