



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Media

SPEECH

Thursday, 14 March 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker McKenzie, Sen Bridget

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Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (15:14): I also rise to take note of answers to questions to Senator Conroy from Senators Sinodinos and Birmingham. Freedom of speech and the press are bedrocks, values of our free and democratic society. The minister has been clear in his condescension and contempt. Even today, owners of media are not happy. Yesterday we had Senator Conroy regaling the Senate with the amount of talks that have been had right around the country and the amount of submissions to the Convergence Review and the Finkelstein review. Senator Conroy was talking a lot yesterday and again today about the missing voices. One of the missing voices, if we read the *Adelaide Advertiser*, is Kim Williams. He says, and I quote, 'Not a single senior newspaper executive or industry representative has had a meaningful consultation with the government' over these particular reforms. I think that is of particular concern, especially when we are talking about the amount of people employed in this industry and the changes being purported.

Senator Conroy also has contempt for regional Australians. Senator Bishop was speaking about diversity of choice, but diversity of choice in media consumption in the regional areas is not at the same level as it is in urban areas. We have 12,200 people employed in regional media, telling our stories, our news and reporting on our sport and our natural disasters and emergencies. This represents not only important information that we need to have at a local and regional level; it also provides a point of critique. These media providers at the local level are also a key aspect of skill expertise within our local communities. Any moves within this legislation to restrict the content, to reduce the diversity of voices available around media in regional areas is of severe concern to the National Party.

Senator Conroy also has contempt for journalists. I just adored this piece from Miranda Devine today, headed 'Is there anything this government will not tamper with?' It said:

In its mistaken belief that more legislation equals good government we are witnessing one of the most frenetic and interventionist administrations our country has ever endured.

And of the laws that have been rushed through:

This bastard child born of revenge and hubris is a threat to free speech and democracy.

That is from the journalists. Senator Conroy also has contempt for cabinet. Senator Sinodinos has prosecuted that very successfully in terms of what cabinet knew and when, in terms of making significant decisions around what can be said and how in our country—his caucus, tick and flick, and his contempt for the Senate. Today the Senate is given four days to examine six pieces of legislation, 133 pages of new regulation. It has been referred to the Senate Environment and Communications Committee—four days to give that a going over. Whilst the minister might spruik the amount of consultation he has gone through before he made a decision, that is one thing. But to give all of Australia, represented here in the Senate, the chance to examine the legislation and the impact it will have on their communities—it is just not good enough.

Minister Conroy today in his answer spoke of conspiracy theories, but the only paranoia is completely in his head, as evidenced by his approach. This is the first direct government intervention in peacetime into what gets printed, said and spoken in peacetime. I did not know we were at war but, according to Senator Conroy, we are at war, because words matter. He does not like what is being said, he does not like what is being shown but that is the price of freedom. You cannot legislate for people to be nice. We should not be legislating journalists to be sanctioned by government and I, like so many Australians right throughout our great country, do not want a government telling me what is in my personal interest.