



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**MOTIONS**

**Sinodinos, Senator Arthur**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 20 March 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 20 March 2014  
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**Questioner** Shorten, Bill, MP  
**Speaker** Bowen, Chris, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BOWEN** (McMahon) (15:19): I second the motion to suspend standing and sessional orders. It is right that the House suspends standing orders to discuss transparency and accountability under this government. This is a Prime Minister who promised the Australian people that he would restore accountability and improve transparency measures. And we have seen accountability and transparency go AWOL under this Prime Minister today. He is not willing to answer for the conduct of his own ministers, and he is not willing to answer for his own conduct. The Australian people have known that this inquiry was coming; everybody in this parliament has known that this inquiry was coming; the Prime Minister knew that this inquiry was coming. There were media reports in December 2012 that the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption has begun to make formal inquiries into Australian Water Holdings. There were media reports in August 2013 that said Australian Water Holdings would be the focus of ICAC public hearings. And what due diligence did the Prime Minister use about that? What inquiries did he make? What did he ask about Senator Sinodinos and his involvement in these matters before appointing him to the high office of Assistant Treasurer? What did the Prime Minister do to protect the integrity of his ministry?

That is a question the opposition is entitled to ask, and it is a question the Australian people are entitled to have answered, and this Prime Minister has failed miserably to do so. We are prepared to give the Prime Minister another chance, another opportunity. He can have 15 minutes of the House to explain what he has done to uphold the integrity of his office and his government. And if he votes against this motion, that means he is unwilling to do so and he is running yet again from that accountability. And we have seen the Prime Minister today, creating a new alibi about the salary and conditions of Senator Sinodinos. We had to drag from him these letters about Senator Sinodinos's entitlements. He told us that it was all crystal clear and clear-cut—that Senator Sinodinos would not receive his ministerial entitlements. Yet we see this letter from Senator Sinodinos that says, 'It is my intention to forgo my ministerial entitlements'—'my intention'. We want to know how that is done under the relevant act of parliament. We want to know whether his superannuation will continue to be paid as a percentage of his entire ministerial salary. We want to know whether he will continue to receive ministerial level travel allowance. We want to know whether he will sit, formally or informally, on the Expenditure Review Committee as this government brings down a budget. These are questions that the Prime Minister should be able to answer. These are questions that the Prime Minister must answer before this House and the Australian people, and if he does not then he has something to hide.

If he was willing to answer these questions, then he should not worry about this motion, he should welcome this motion. He should embrace this motion, and thank the House for the time it is prepared to give him to explain his conduct and the conduct of his government, to explain what measures he has put in place so that the Australian people can have confidence that he is running an administration of appropriate accountability and transparency measures, as he suggested.

We have seen this government ducking and weaving all week. We had the speculation about whether Senator Sinodinos would stand aside or not, about whether the Prime Minister would ask him to. Well, the Prime Minister did ask him to, but he did it through the pages of Australia's newspapers—that is how he treats his ministers. He sends smoke signals to one of his colleagues, sending him the message that it might be a good idea to stand aside. When matters like this arise, as the Leader of Opposition has said, there is one fundamental question that somebody who sits in that chair must answer: what did you know, and when did you know it? It is an old question, but it is a question that has stood the test of time, and it is a question this Prime Minister has failed miserably to answer.

Senator Sinodinos has had great responsibilities. He has been responsible for things like changing Australia's financial advice laws, laws that were introduced after \$6 billion was ripped off of 120,000 Australians, laws that were introduced to provide more protection, more accountability, and more transparency. Senator Sinodinos is ripping these laws up, and this Prime Minister is letting it happen. He has got some serious explaining to do about this entire matter, and if he will not do it in question time then he should do it now.

The leader of the House is about to get on his hind feet and talk to the House. The Prime Minister should be doing that. The Prime Minister should be taking this opportunity to explain to the Australian people what he knew, and when he knew it. The Prime Minister should be accountable to the Australian people and he should be taking this opportunity— (*Time expired*)