



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Budget

SPEECH

Thursday, 15 May 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 15 May 2014
Page 3987
Questioner
Speaker Rowland, Michelle, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:52): I rise today to discuss the utter deceit of this government in relation to public broadcasting in Australia. On the night before the election, standing in the marginal federal seat of Lindsay, the opposition leader, now Prime Minister, said:

No cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS.

My favourite is when the Prime Minister, in the parliament on 13 February this year, when asked if he stood by this pre-election statement, told the House:

Of course I stand by all the commitments that this government made prior to the election. If there is one lesson that members opposite should have learnt from the experience of the previous term of parliament it is that you cannot say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards.

If only this Prime Minister had taken his own advice, and I bet his own backbench are thinking the same.

The budget delivered on Tuesday night broke every single promise the Prime Minister made in that statement the night before the election—every single one. I wonder what the people of Lindsay are thinking now, especially the voters—and there would have been a considerable number—who saw the then opposition leader saying those words in their own electorate and got up the next morning, went to their polling booths and cast their votes for the Liberal candidate. They were deceived. 'No cuts to the ABC or the SBS'—you could not have been clearer. It begs the question: would they have voted for their Liberal candidate if they had known then what they know now?

This government ripped \$232.3 million from the ABC on Tuesday night, including abolishing the Australia Network, and has cut \$43½ million from the budgets of the ABC and SBS, with a promise of more to come when the Minister for Communications gets the efficiency review in coming weeks. What is the bet that is a promise they will actually keep! It is a down payment, and the ABC themselves have made it clear in estimates, saying they will need to make cuts to services, very possibly including those in rural and regional areas.

The ABC Managing Director Mark Scott confirmed that the ABC cuts were a broken promise. In a media statement he issued on budget night he said:

The funding cuts will be disappointing for audiences. The government gave repeated commitments before and after the election that funding for the Corporation would be maintained.

Let me say that again. These are the words of the Managing Director of the ABC. The government gave 'repeated commitments' on which he and his management team would have relied, just as voters would have relied on those statements. I ask the question again: if they had known then what they know now, would they have voted for the Liberal candidates on 7 September? Mark Scott went on to say:

... the funding cuts would regrettably and inevitably—

'inevitably', not 'might'—

result in redundancies and a reduction in services.

Who is going to feel this the most? There are a few groups who will feel it the most but particularly people who reside in rural and regional parts of Australia. And what have we heard? Not a peep from those representatives, who should get up and say publicly that this is wrong and should not go ahead.

In his first press conference as Prime Minister on 16 September last year, the Prime Minister said:

I don't intend on making promises that I won't keep.

In the first few months of this government there has been nothing more than broken promises. As the Prime Minister successfully lectured to the previous government, you cannot say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards.

These cuts impact not only people in the bush but also people in the cities, in our diverse and multicultural communities, who rely on the excellent services provided by the SBS. As the SBS Managing Director, Michael Ebeid, told the Fairfax press this week:

We were really hoping the promise made before the election would be kept and there would be not cuts to the ABC or SBS. SBS is already an under-funded organisation and we have been using efficiencies to cover existing costs.

... ..

Any future cuts would have to impact on content and Australian content which is 10 to 15 times more expensive to produce.

When our language services start getting cut, I look forward to those coalition MPs in inner city and outer metro areas feeling the heat on this issue because, again, as I said, people voted for this government believing it would not cut the ABC or the SBS and they were deceived.