



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

SPEECH

Monday, 16 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Christensen, George, MP

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Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (13:15): I am pleased to speak on this motion moved by the member for Bendigo, and I note the long rivalry on the Women's National Basketball League court between the Bendigo Spirit and the Townsville Fire. The member was undoubtedly a passionate supporter of the Bendigo Spirit as, sadly, they defeated Townsville Fire to take out titles in 2013 and 2014. However, those defeats just made this year's victory all the sweeter for the Fire, for Townsville, for myself and also for the member for Herbert—another passionate supporter of anyone representing Townsville and North Queensland in a sporting arena. The 75-65 grand final win for the Townsville Fire, eight days ago, represents the first national sporting title secured by a North Queensland team.

The ABC's broadcast of women's basketball is a demonstration of the value of a national broadcaster providing services to regional areas and covering sporting events ignored by the commercial networks. As a representative of a regional electorate, I can understand the member for Bendigo's despair with the national broadcaster's decision to cut such a service to regions across the country. I agree with a bit of this motion, but to peddle the ABC's propaganda that axing women's basketball comes as a result of long-overdue savings is supporting the blackmail of our constituents and protecting and supporting the institutionalised waste of taxpayers' funds.

Let me put the government's savings measures into perspective. The ABC is spending more than \$1 billion of taxpayers' money every year. As a result of Labor's debt and deficit disaster, the budget asks for small savings that will mean the ABC will receive \$5.2 billion over the next five years instead of \$5.5 billion. That is a saving of \$254 million over five years, or 4.6 per cent. In the real world, where media organisations are not gifted billions of dollars of taxpayer money, such a small saving would be laughable. Commercial networks are able to produce more services and better services at a fraction of the cost. But the ABC's response was to hold Peppa Pig hostage and start blackmailing regional areas and women's sport.

The ABC's own finance executives were involved in last year's Lewis efficiency study, which demonstrated savings were achievable if the ABC was willing to tackle inefficiencies in its back-office functions. The efficiency study canvassed a range of savings measures that would not affect content, such as women's sports, or service delivery to the regions, such as rationalising technology by removing duplication, standardising solutions and retiring old assets; centralising procurement; reducing managers and administrative support staff; outsourcing the payroll function; or working in conjunction with their fellow taxpayer-funded broadcaster, SBS, for procurement. Last year, we saw the ludicrous situation where the ABC outbid its fellow national broadcaster, SBS, for the Asian Cup football tournament. While SBS, the long-time home of soccer broadcasting in Australia, planned to cover the cost of their smaller bid with commercial advertising, the ABC simply threw \$1.5 million of taxpayer money at the bid. What is the ABC doing, competing against its fellow national broadcaster—indeed, what is the ABC doing competing on any of the services provided by the private sector?

Why did the ABC waste taxpayer money to establish their FactCheck, effectively killing off the private development of a local version of Politifact? More pointedly, why is the ABC spending taxpayer dollars telling people how to vote? The vast expense committed to the ABC's Vote Compass cannot be seen as anything other than an instruction manual on how to cast your vote, according to the ABC's interpretation. The taxpayer-funded website, Vote Compass, says:

Vote Compass is an educational tool developed by political scientists. Answer a short series of questions to discover how you fit in the New South Wales political landscape.

The site is advertised across the ABC's vast array of networks and it takes you through a number of questions related to policy, framed by the ABC of course. The issues and policies are interpreted by the ABC and reduced to simple questions by the ABC, and answers are weighted to parties by the ABC. The result is how closely your answers align to political parties. There are questions like:

How much should be done to accommodate religious minorities in New South Wales?

What is this sort of question? The ability to align such questions and answers with party policies is highly questionable. Why is the ABC doing this? Why don't they focus on their charter and promote women's sport?
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