



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

In Committee

SPEECH

Thursday, 17 March 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 17 March 2016
Page 2514
Questioner
Speaker Collins, Sen Jacinta

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Senator JACINTA COLLINS (Victoria) (01:28): I understand that, at this hour, following where the minister was up to is not necessarily—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I was talking to the clerk—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: I understand. I was not being critical, but it does help me move towards the point that I am making. I note that Senator Rhiannon is now back in the chamber. I was about to suggest or hope that she had gone to have a rest, because the contribution that she made a little while ago was so unhinged. But it did reinforce where we are in the consideration of this legislation. As much as I would like to hear Senator Wong go into further references and, perhaps, long quotes that challenge the position that the minister is seeking to maintain or recreate, I seriously do think that at this hour we are in quite a ridiculous process.

Let me remind both the Greens and the government, though, that this is a process of your creation. So do not try to sheet home the blame to anyone else. Do not try to say that anyone else is responsible for the fact that we are attempting to have adequate consideration of this matter—in order to make up for the fraud that was the government's consultation in developing these measures, not to mention the purported committee consideration that was so inadequate that we could not even question the department. Indeed even the Greens could not question the department about important aspects.

I thought I sighted Senator Xenophon a moment ago. I thought perhaps he was back in the chamber with us. I want to go back briefly to an earlier discussion that took place, I think, when he was not here. Senator Cormann was using this rhetoric about 'choice'. As part of the discussion, he said people should not be forced to vote for parties they might not want to vote for. I thought for a moment: 'My God! He is going to go down the path of an argument for voluntary voting', because what he seemed to be suggesting was that people should not be forced to follow the very instructions he claims are going to be on the ballot papers, which is for people to vote for the number of positions that are being filled. Instead he is saying, 'No, you should not be forced to vote for a party if you do not want to.' That sort of philosophy would take us very much down the path towards voluntary voting.

I contrast that with Senator Xenophon's discussion about New South Wales, the ACT and what an appropriate benchmark would be to allow us to subsequently review what the implications of the changes had been. When he said that, I thought: 'Good heavens! Senator Xenophon has given these issues more competent consideration than the minister is displaying in his reference to them.' The minister was asked what the appropriate benchmarking would be, but instead of answering he gave us a philosophical discussion about how people should not be forced to vote.

I am sorry, but—

Senator Cormann: That is not what I said.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: You go back and read what you were saying, because it was definitely leading right down that path. When I get the *Hansard*, I will put it right under your nose. You have already misrepresented the AEC's position. I have had the *Hansard* here and have cited it on several occasions to demonstrate how you were not following, as you were claiming, that position. You showed you did not really know what happened in the JSCM's considerations and you have misrepresented the AEC's position on several occasions. So please do not take that holier-than-thou attitude now.

Add to that these glib comments and insults flying across the chamber. 'That is so two hours ago' was one comment I heard. I wanted to refer, and I will now refer, to a complaint that came to my office. It was not two hours ago; it was about an hour ago. The complaint that came to my office an hour ago was: 'I think that this matter and how it is being dealt with is a form of the gag. I am here listening and the coverage was shut off at midnight.' The coverage of this debate was shut down at midnight.

An honourable senator interjecting—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: It is! In terms of public transparency and the processes of this parliament, to shut down the public broadcast of our considerations is appalling. Again this highlights the process. The way this person represented the issue to my staff was that this was just another form of the gag. The Greens are getting pretty experienced at this: 'Let's force the debate to occur late at night. Let's slide it through. Let's deal with it as legislation by attrition.' They want to sit here and wear people down rather than justify their case.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: What does that lead to? It leads to the sorts of unhinged contributions we are hearing now. Senator Xenophon has rightly chosen this time to reinforce his point, because Senator Xenophon knows what the alternatives are—and we have used those alternatives in the past

At this hour of night, what a competent government would be doing is saying, 'How close are we to making progress on this?' And if we were not close to making significant progress then we would suspend and commence again the next day, after senators have had an opportunity to get some sleep. But this is not what is happening, and that is why I move:

That progress be reported and the committee have leave to sit again on the next day of sitting.

The CHAIRMAN: The question is that progress be reported and the committee have leave to sit again on the next day of sitting.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Senator Back): The question is that the amendment moved by the minister, Senator Cormann—