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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

In Committee

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Page 2600
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Speaker Collins, Sen Jacinta

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Senator JACINTA COLLINS (Victoria) (08:00): I assume there is nobody else that wants to make comments in relation to these amendments at the moment, so I would like to respond to some of the issues that have been raised in the debate. Firstly, I would like to thank my colleagues that have pointed out that this is the way for the Greens to remove the keys to the double dissolution that they, unwittingly it seems, provided.

We heard from Senator Di Natale his excuse for that and it was incredibly naive. I do not intend to waste the committee's time much further than with that general reflection, but on top of those contributions there are a couple of other issues that have been canvassed over the day that I think we need to revisit. Senator Rhiannon still runs the fraud that her amendment adequately deals with the issues. We know, firstly, on the double dissolution issue that they obviously do not. But the suggestion that the Greens have accepted—this disingenuous position of Senator Cormann that the double dissolution and the Senate reform are two mutually exclusive issues—is laughable. It is absolutely laughable. I have covered that issue before and I do not intend to go into much more detail there.

The issue that Senator Cormann has addressed during the course of the evening was the evidence before JSCEM in relation to what the AEC required. Despite the fact that in her few minutes before the AEC Senator Rhiannon actually addressed these issues, it seems that she did not comprehend the answers that were given to her, so I will go back to the *Hansard* once again.

I suspect that it has now gotten to a stage of denial. The Greens are in denial. They are locked in, they cannot move, they have to trot over and vote with the government regardless, and so they maintain that denial. Again, Senator Rhiannon talks about a three-month period, or a period of around three months. We know what the evidence that was given to JSCEM by Mr Rogers was. It was 'an estimated three-month minimum time frame'. We also know that Mr Rogers said in the very next sentence of his opening statement:

However, I do wish to emphasise that this estimate and all associated advice is based on the broad shape of the current proposal. Should the bill change significantly, the AEC will need to revise its timing, cost and other resource estimates.

So the minister has refused to provide information to the Senate even about what those estimates were, firstly, and then he sought to deny that the complete change to the below-the-line voting approach was significant, which is ridiculous.

Senator Rhiannon has left her head buried in the sand on the three-month issue. We know the AEC has struggled with certain issues. This was the basis for the JSCEM inquiry that reported in 2014. We know they have told the joint parliamentary committee they need a minimum of three months. Indeed, I need to remind Senator Rhiannon that she actually asked Mr Rogers about this. He said:

Sorry, could I also be on record—

I do not know why he thought he would not be—

as saying that the three-month period is already a streamlined three-month period in any case.

Senator Rhiannon said:

So you are saying that it is already tight?

And Mr Rogers said yes. So this time frame that Senator Rhiannon is proposing as an alternative is, at the very best, 'tight', 'streamlined' and not adequate. It is not adequate at all to deal with the timing issues.

I am not surprised that Senator Rhiannon has forgotten or has not quite understood the procedural issues here, because in the debate she has also misrepresented what happened earlier in the week. She stood in here and suggested that Labor had supported bringing on the ABCC legislation. That was simply false. Senator Rhiannon, you need to learn the difference between a procedural motion and a substantive one. What we supported was a suspension motion. The sooner you learn how this place operates the better, if you are going to be remaining here. To come in here and try to lecture us on what the process is, what amendment we are on, and not even be accurate and then to misrepresent what votes have occurred is outrageous.

Senator Siewert: Mr Temporary Chairman, I rise on a point of order. Could you please remind Senator Collins to address the chair and not to directly yell across the chamber at Senator Rhiannon.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Senator Seselja): Senator Collins, I would remind you to address your remarks through chair.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Thank you, Chair. I am more than happy to address my remarks through the chair. It has indeed been a long evening and when Senator Rhiannon continues to add falsehoods to the debate, or to introduce her own interjections into the debate at different stages—

Senator Rhiannon: Mr Temporary Chairman, I rise on a point of order. I am requesting that the statement 'falsehoods' be withdrawn. All I said was that they had supported bringing ABCC on.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Senator Wong interjecting—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order, Senator Wong! I will rule. As much as you may not like it, 'falsehoods' is not unparliamentary. It is a debating point, and you have the opportunity to respond.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Senator Rhiannon is a bit touchy. She came into the chamber and she decided to give us a lecture about where we were up to this morning. She was false that time too. She was on the wrong amendment. She did not even know what amendment we were on when she was lecturing us about what we were doing. So yes, it is appropriate that I address the other falsehoods, because her procedural understanding seems to be extremely limited.

We have concerns not only about the unprincipled approach to how we have dealt with this legislation—and we are still here dealing with substantive matters at seven past eight in the morning. This is, people need to understand, an alternative to a gag. This is legislation by attrition, and any pretence from the Greens that they have not gagged this matter is a joke. Anyone who understands human stamina knows that. I have to say that Senator Cormann is up at the very top. You are the one person who has almost exclusively stayed in this chamber right through the whole period, so I give you credit for that. You are still looking pretty fresh, I have to say. I should also acknowledge that some of your advisers and at least one of our advisers have been here through the process too. But human endurance has its limitations. The Greens can run this pretence that we are not really gagging it. The reality is that this is legislation by attrition, and that is as effective as any gag you could imagine, so stop the pretence.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Senator Seselja): The question is that opposition amendment (1) on sheet 7859 moved by Senator Collins be agreed to.