



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

In Committee

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Collins, Sen Jacinta

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Senator JACINTA COLLINS (Victoria) (08:28): I wish I could share Senator Cormann's enthusiasm about the processes of JSCem, but unfortunately, after participating in the last inquiry, I know that is impossible. So, the opposition is happy to support Senator Wang's proposal to have—

Senator Ian Macdonald interjecting—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Chair, can I please express that it is very difficult with Senator Macdonald sitting right behind me verbalising to actually even concentrate on what I am saying?

Senator Ian Macdonald interjecting—

The CHAIRMAN: Senator Macdonald, what you have just said is very inappropriate. You have said it from someone else's chair. So, if you are not going to sit in your own seat, I would ask you to remain silent.

Senator Ian Macdonald interjecting—

The CHAIRMAN: Well, I have just asked you to remain silent, and you have immediately not remained silent, so I will ask you again to remain silent.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Senator Cormann; I also noticed you entreating your colleague to conduct himself in a more appropriate way, and I appreciate that attempt.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: I do not know why the Greens down there are carrying on. Perhaps they would not appreciate having someone sitting right behind them, under this process, in the way that was just occurring. Given that already to date we have had complaints from the Greens that we are 'looking at' them, well, look at this—seriously. So, get over the giggles, please.

An honourable senator: [inaudible] cranky.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Well, yes I am cranky. I have already made my comments about what I think about this process of legislation by attrition. I have made that point. And when senators who have not been participating in this debate come in and throw in their trite comments, as I think Senator Cormann is also trying to highlight, they do not expedite the process. I am more than happy to expedite the process to deal with the substantive issues here, and I have not even been able to get through the third paragraph of the opposition's position in relation to Senator Wang's amendment. So, I will try again.

Regarding the review that Senator Wang proposes—that it be an independent review—Senator Cormann, I did not take it to specify, and I did not take it from Senator Wang's comments that he was specifying, that it must be the AEC. Now, potentially it could be the AEC, but equally it could be some other independent party conducting the review, as deemed appropriate by the minister. That is how I read this amendment and how I took Senator Wang's comments to represent it. Such a review will provide an independent analysis of the impact of the bill and the adequacy of resources provided to the AEC to implement the changes ushered in by the bill, amongst other things. It is not appropriate, and nor is it micromanagement, to suggest that the legislation should set up a process.

Regarding the review itself, in terms of looking at the changes, I was hoping Senator Xenophon might have joined us over that last division; I thought it would be helpful to add to the consideration of this amendment the comments Senator Xenophon made earlier about what the appropriate benchmarking is and what issues we want to look at in terms of what we would regard as appropriate benchmarking and indeed potentially success. So, if

this amendment gets up I would encourage those looking at how it should proceed to look at the discussion and the issues raised earlier by Senator Xenophon in terms of some of the benchmarking issues that would be helpful.

Senator Wang's amendment will require the findings of an independent review to be tabled in the House and the Senate so that they can be scrutinised by the parliament and the Australian people. And I am sure the Greens political party will see the merit in having an independent review of the most significant changes to our electoral system in 30 years—although I suspect, unfortunately, that they will probably just cop the line that JSCEM can do it, despite the experience we just went through with the last JSCEM inquiry. It would be nice if they broke away from their trotting across the chamber with the government on every issue and demonstrated that they were up for an appropriate independent review, but the pattern of their behaviour in process in this matter leaves me very doubtful that that is likely to occur.

The other reason, of course, that this is important is that the shambolic handling of this legislation by the government and their new coalition partners, the Greens, make it critical that the Senate agree to Senator Wang's amendment. This legislation is the product, as we have seen, of this deal between the Liberals and the Greens and Senator Xenophon which is now being rammed through the parliament at lightning speed as part of the Prime Minister's plan to rush to the polls for a double dissolution election.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Again the Greens laugh, because they are maintaining this charade that legislation by attrition is not a gag. Well, it is a gag, and the lightning speed is this week—although, you never know: they might still be up for until Easter, but I suspect not. It is this week. That is the lightning speed. The speed was the speed that I described earlier, when Senator Cormann responded to the recommendations of the sham JSCEM inquiry within 64 minutes in this place with his first reading contribution. Indeed, it was printed and tabled in that time frame.

It is laughable to suggest that the government considered the JSCEM's recommendations, as limited as they were, within that time frame. It was a fix. It was a set-up. It was, as was suggested by some of the commentary on Antony Green's website, prearranged, preordained. The only question in all of this, which maybe the future will be able to tell us, is: to what extent were the Greens complicit in this preordained plan? Were they deluded too, or were they completely complicit in it? And you never know: an independent review might shed some light on that issue. It will be helpful in the longer term to have an understanding of these issues, and for these reasons Labor is pleased to support the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN: The question is that amendment (1) on sheet 7876 revised, moved by Senator Wang, be agreed to.