



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:**  
**TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

**Immigration**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 14 August 2006**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 14 August 2006  
**Page** 38  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Brandis, Sen George

**Source** Senate  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland) (3.22 pm)—I always find it very entertaining in these debates to listen to these pious little lectures by members of the Australian Labor Party about issues of party governance. We had it again this afternoon, first from Senator Evans in relation to the Prime Minister's announcement concerning the withdrawal of the Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill 2006. Senator Evans tried to ridicule Senator Vanstone. He tried to ridicule the government because the government made a decision today, in light of the announced intention of a government senator to exercise a right of conscience to vote against that bill and the likelihood, therefore, that the bill would not pass the Senate, not to persist with it. When was the last time anybody in the Australian Labor Party was vouchsafed the right to exercise their conscience? Never. And whenever they have attempted to do so, when was the last time they escaped political punishment for it? Never.

Mr Deputy President, if you have not already seen it, might I direct your attention to a most illuminating article in Saturday's *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper by the veteran political journalist Mr Alan Ramsey. It was on the editorial page and called 'The lost art of crossing the floor'. Mr Ramsey made the observation that of the 245 members of parliament who have in the last half century, on occasions, not voted the party line in the parliament, all but 28 were from the coalition. Of 245 members of parliament who have exercised a right of conscience, only 28 times out of the 245 was that ever done by members of the Australian Labor Party. Even that overstates the figure, because if we look at those 28 rare occasions in half a century when a Labor politician has exercised a right of conscience, what do we find? We find that most of them were Labor politicians in the fifties who left the party during the split, like Senator George Cole, or that they were Labor politicians like Mr Graeme Campbell, the former member for Kalgoorlie, who were promptly expelled from the Australian Labor Party.

It is an issue of party governance, Senator Ludwig. The way the Labor Party does business and the way the government parties do business are entirely at variance from one another. We have seen in this parliament, since the new Senate convened after 1 July last year, a number of occasions when members of the government parties have crossed the floor. Senator Humphries crossed the floor recently on the legislation in relation to same-sex couples in the Australian Capital Territory. Senator Humphries continues to sit in the government party room and has an honoured place in it. Senator Barnaby Joyce, on two or three occasions now, has voted against the government policy line. But Senator Barnaby Joyce continues to sit in the government party room and has a welcome place in it. Last week Ms Moylan, Mr Georgiou and Mr Broadbent crossed the floor in the House of Representatives on the unauthorised arrivals legislation. They will join us at our party meeting tomorrow and each will continue to have an honoured place in it.

So do not give us pious little lectures, Senator Evans or Senator Ludwig, about the way in which the government does business. The right of free conscience exercised in good faith and with appropriate seriousness of purpose exists in the government parties and it does not exist in the Australian Labor Party. And do not tell us about policy consistency, Senator Ludwig. How many positions has the Australian Labor Party had on border security over the last few years? How many policy positions have you had on uranium over the last few years? How many different policy positions have you had on the terrorism legislation in the last couple of years? How many different policy positions have you had on tax reform? You have been all over the shop, and the reason is that the Labor Party does not know how to handle internal differences of opinion. Being an authoritarian party, it cannot deal with them. The caucus system will not admit of it. (*Time expired*)