



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



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

**Media Ownership**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 14 September 2006**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 14 September 2006  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Brandis, Sen George

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**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland) (3.18 pm)—I was pleased that Senator Conroy referred in his speech to Mr Paul Keating's interview on *Lateline* last night. I, too, watched Mr Paul Keating's interview on *Lateline* and all the memories came flooding back as I saw Mr Keating—a bit greyer than he was, his face a bit hollower than it was, and his voice a bit thicker than we remember it from the days of the Keating government. No doubt that air of ennui reflects 10 years of schadenfreude at the prospects of the Australian Labor Party and federal politics since the fall of the Keating government in 1996. And I couldn't help thinking, 'Is this what the Australian Labor Party has come to in their media policy?'

You see, I was second to none in being a critic of Mr Keating and the 17 per cent interest rates that he gave us. But there were certain aspects of public policy—it cannot be doubted—in which Mr Keating was ahead of the game, and he kept a reluctant, mulish, recalcitrant, pervicacious Australian Labor Party ahead of the game in reforming certain sectors of our economy. In particular, we remember financial deregulation. And my side of politics has always given full credit to Mr Keating for his achievements in that field. They were achievements which, as the journalist George Megalogenis recently wrote in his very good book *The Longest Decade*, were the precursors of the fuller reforms that the Howard government has undertaken.

But sadly that reforming zeal, which in some respects marked Mr Keating's approach to certain sectors of the Australian economy, has been completely lost both on him and on the party he once led when it comes to cross-media laws. We have the sorry spectacle of the opposition in this country, engaged in a debate of national importance about media policy, saddled with a policy that was written before the digital revolution, and represented in this place—though you would not know it, so seldom is he given the opportunity even to ask questions about policy at question time; today was an exception—with a spokesman on communications, Senator Stephen Conroy, of whom we know from Mr Latham's diaries, when offered the portfolio of communications after the last federal election by Mr Latham, his then leader, said, 'I don't want to be the shadow minister for communications because I'm not interested in the area. I know nothing about it. I'm not interested in it; let me do something else. It has no appeal for me.'

Nevertheless, Senator Stephen Conroy did end up being the shadow minister for communications and, my goodness, hasn't his lack of interest or knowledge in the area been an embarrassing display for the whole of the Australian people in the two years or so since? That is a fact not lost, I might say, on Mr Lindsay Tanner, the member for Melbourne, who one might think really was the shadow spokesman for communications. So, Senator Conroy, I say to you, through the chair: it does not matter how abusive your language, it does not matter how inflammatory your rhetoric, it does not matter how confected your outrage, it does not matter how sesquipedalian your language and it does not matter how ideological your intent—none of the political theatre in which you engage matters one iota. It does not camouflage from the Australian people your lack of interest in this area of policy. Nor does it camouflage from the Australian people that the Australian Labor Party's attitude to cross-media ownership laws predates pay TV, predates the digital revolution and predates the further internationalisation of the telecommunications sector of the Australian economy.

To this day—not more than a year before the next federal election, after 10½ years of policy laziness and being asleep at the wheel on this, as on so many other areas of public policy—the Australian Labor Party still cannot find a consistent, coherent, understandable, modern position on cross-media ownership laws. What a lamentable failure. What a disgrace, Senator Forshaw. What a disgrace. (*Time expired*)