



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

**Royal Commission into Trade Union
Governance and Corruption, Health Funding**

SPEECH

Tuesday, 11 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui	Question No.

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (20:25): If corruption and crime was not having a serious impact on Australia's political system then Royal Commissioner Heydon would never have described his secret interim report as containing information which is defined as:

... a grave threat to the power and the authority of the Australian state ...

And today the Senate has been shown why this Liberal and National government cannot be trusted to clean-up all the corruption that is stinking up and rotting our state and federal political systems, especially the corruption and crime in our building and construction industry. If the Abbott government was serious about tackling crime and corruption in the building and construction industry and lowering costs, they would have moved very quickly to deregister the CFMEU, and perhaps other unions, just as the Liberal and then Labor Party combined in the 1980s to finally deregister a similar union, the Builders Labourers Federation or BLF.

Instead, the Abbott government has used the CFMEU's obvious links to outlaw bikie gangs, standover merchants, hit men and criminals to justify the establishment of a royal commission, whose greater purpose is to target the Labor Party of Australia, while it appears to ignore or actively cover-up corruption and the effects of organised criminal activity within the Liberal Party.

I put this simple question to the Australian people: how can a distinguished judge and royal commissioner, Commissioner Heydon, gather secret evidence from witnesses fearing for their lives and described as showing:

... a grave threat to the power and the authority of the Australian state ...

without both the Liberal and Labor parties being suspects?

Does the Liberal Party think that the Australian people are stupid enough to believe that the Labor Party is the only party who has governed Australia which has been influenced by organised criminals and standover men? Of course, the Liberals and the Nationals have been associated with criminals just as bad as the criminals associated with the Labor Party. You only have to look at a recent ABC *Four Corners* report 'The Mafia in Australia: drugs, murder and politics' to understand that there is strong evidence to show that sophisticated, organised crime has infiltrated Australian politics at the highest levels by cultivating people in positions of power from both sides of politics.

I have written a number of letters and received some replies from Royal Commissioner Heydon to try to gather the important and relevant information that he has. I need to make an informed vote on the government's ABCC legislation, which is designed to tackle union corruption. I am deeply disappointed by the refusal to date of Royal Commissioner Heydon to share with me and other crossbench senators all of his reports and information on criminal activities and corruption in Australian politics. Specifically, I refer to his secret corruption report that he has shared with the Prime Minister and his staff, Senator Abetz and his staff, all the premiers of Australia's states and their staff, but has refused to share it with the crossbench senators. The information in the Heydon royal commission secret reports is vital to the decision-making process that all senators in this chamber must take in regard to the ABCC legislation.

The premiers of Australia do not have a vote in this chamber, yet this royal commissioner has allowed them access to this confidential information—information that should also be shared with senators of this chamber. I consider it an absolute insult to the intelligence and integrity of all senators in this chamber, especially crossbench senators, that Royal Commissioner Heydon has chosen to refuse access to his secret report, because he does not trust me or other senators of this place with the information, yet he trusts it with state premiers and their staff.

If Royal Commissioner Heydon fails to release his secret report to senators, Australians could be justified in saying that evidence showing associations, links and influence between criminals and political parties—including the Liberal and National parties—is being covered up or not being acted on. Justice must not only be done; justice must be seen to be done. If Royal Commissioner Heydon fails to release his secret report to senators, Australians could be justified in saying that his reliability as a royal commissioner could be called into question. The parliament is the ultimate body for review and scrutiny of these strongly interconnected matters. I am of the view that, by withholding this vital information from senators, Commissioner Heydon has interfered with my free and fair performance as a member of this parliament.

I believe in public health. I value the doctors and nurses who work long hours in our public hospitals, often sacrificing their own health to help save our lives and to protect our families' wellbeing. I saw it first-hand when I was sick and trapped on welfare. I relied on the doctors and nurses who work in our public health system to save my life and the lives of my family and, now that I am healthy and a senator in federal parliament, it is my turn to give back and to speak out for our public health medical professionals who have been told to shut up or else they will lose their jobs.

Tasmania's public health system is in extreme crisis and is dangerous. Every day our media uncovers tragic examples of ordinary Tasmanians whose lives are at risk because they are forced onto extraordinarily long public health waiting lists or are denied timely medical care because our hospitals are full.

The latest Tasmanian state Liberal government's health white paper is nothing more than a clever whitewash. It is political propaganda. The Liberal state government has used a slick advertising campaign—at taxpayers' expense—to cover up their plan to downgrade and close two public hospitals in Tasmania's north-west: the Burnie Regional Hospital and the Mersey Community Hospital. In doing so, they will decrease even further the availability of acute care public hospital beds and associated medical professional support for people in the areas of Devonport, Ulverstone, Burnie, Wynyard, Smithton, Stanley, Woolnorth, Zeehan, Strahan, Rosebery, Queenstown and surrounding areas. All signs in the health white paper indicate that future conservative governments will consolidate Tasmania's tertiary public health care into two public hospitals: one at Launceston and one at Hobart.

A Tasmanian commission of health report released last year shows that our public hospital bed per 1,000 head of population ratio was at 2.35. This compares with the national average of 2.6, as reported by the AMA. If Tasmania were to increase the number of fully funded and resourced public hospital beds to match the Australian average of 2.6 public beds per 1,000 head of population, it would mean that, with a state population of about half a million, the number of public hospital beds should be 1,333.8. Given that last year's commission of health report shows that there is only a total of 1,188 public beds available for sick Tasmanians requiring medical treatment in a hospital, that means that the Tasmanian government would need to open another 145 to 146 public hospital beds just to catch up to the Australian mainland average. It is estimated that each funded and resourced public hospital bed costs about \$1 million each year to run, so in order to provide the same level of health care as the mainland Tasmania needs to invest \$146 million extra into its annual Tasmanian health organisations budget of \$627 million, give or take—an increase in annual funding of 23 per cent.

A question: who will increase the number of Tasmania's funded and resourced public hospital beds by 146 so that we can at least catch up to the mainland average bed numbers? The answer: not the Tasmanian Liberals, because their health white paper is nothing but a sly, slick plan to eventually close down all public beds in the north-west of Tasmania and consolidate acute care to two hospitals—Launceston hospital and the Hobart general hospital—which, by the way, are operating at 100 per cent capacity and are in crisis as well. Given the criminal lack of funded, resourced, staffed acute care hospital beds—and that there is no plan to address that fundamental problem—it will come as no surprise to hear that Tasmanians are: (1) waiting four times longer than other Australians for elective surgery; and (2) dying, on average, between one and two years earlier than mainland Australians.

Tonight I call on the Liberal state government to stop the lies, propaganda and madness contained in their health white paper and to come up with a plan which guarantees that public health survives in Tasmania's north-west, instead of the bureaucratic bloody rubbish which guarantees the gradual destruction of Tasmania's public health system.