



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

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QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Internet Content

QUESTION

Monday, 15 March 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner Boyce, Sen Sue
Speaker

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Internet Content

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (2.52 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy. I refer to the decision by Reporters Without Borders to put Australia number one on a list of countries ‘under surveillance’ in its *Internet Enemies* report because ‘the government wants to set up a filtering system never before seen in a democracy’. Is the minister concerned that his mandatory internet censorship plan has put Australia alongside countries like Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Belarus, Thailand and Turkey on the ‘under surveillance’ list in the eyes of the international community?

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy)—I thank Senator Boyce for that question. Unfortunately, Reporters Without Borders have been seriously misled, much like many people in this chamber, about what the government is actually proposing. It is wrong in the facts about what the government is proposing and it is wrong in terms of its comparison with other countries. Let me be very clear so that this chamber understands exactly what this government is proposing. On 15 December, we announced new measures to enhance the existing cybersafety policy. What we have indicated we will block is content that has been refused classification—material that is not currently available in a newsagent, in a book store, on a DVD, at the movies or on your television. That is the only material that is proposed to be blocked.

What Reporters Without Borders are continually being told is that that material that is proposed to be blocked is unwanted content or inappropriate content. That is not the policy that we are taking forward and that we have announced. What we have announced is perfectly clear. Anyone in this chamber or anyone who talks to Reporters Without Borders who tries to suggest that anything other than material included in the RC classification is subject to the filter is misleading all Australians. Let me be very clear: the material under the RC classification is material like child pornography, pro-rape websites and pro-bestiality websites—material of that nature. You

cannot buy it on DVD and you cannot buy it a book store. (*Time expired*)

Senator BOYCE (Queensland)—Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. We seem to have a Johnny-onestep situation here, where the Senate and Reporters Without Borders do not know what is going on. No-one in the community except the minister does. Isn't Reporters Without Borders right when it states, ‘Even though a true national debate on the subject is needed, Senator Conroy has made such a discussion very problematic by branding his critics as child pornography advocates’?

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy)—Once again, the material that has been supplied to Reporters Without Borders comes from Electronic Frontiers Australia, who have been challenged publicly on a number of occasions to produce a quote where I have ever said that. After six months, they have been unwilling to provide one quote. And I challenge you to produce a quote where I have suggested that because someone has a disagreement on this issue that they are a paedophile or a supporter of paedophiles. I challenge each and every one of you to come up with such a quote, because it does not exist. Electronic Frontiers Australia have run one of the most disgraceful misinformation campaigns and have misled Australians.

But if you want further evidence of why this is not getting debated in the mainstream, let me take you to the *Hungry Beast* ABC show, a show that advocates against our policy. It commissioned a survey of 1,000 Australians by a reputable company. What did it find? Eighty per cent of Australians support the government's policy. (*Time expired*)

Senator BOYCE (Queensland)—Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. In the circumstances, I doubt the minister can assist, given that everyone except him appears to be misled. But is the minister aware that Reporters Without Borders describe his proposal as ‘a draconian filtering system’? Is this the reason that many of his Labor colleagues, including Senator Kate Lundy, remain deeply opposed to it?

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy)—Let me clarify yet again: refused

classification is material that each and every one in this chamber opposes being available in books, on TV, in cinemas and on DVD. But apparently this new distribution platform, otherwise known as the internet, should be something sacred. It should not have to play by the rules of Australia. I have met with representatives of international companies who say, 'We think your refused classification system is wrong.' It is very kind of those companies to come to Australia and tell us that we are not in charge of our classification system. We have put out a paper and invited anyone who is concerned to suggest ways that we can ensure that the material on the list stays confined to that in the refused classification category. If you have a genuine concern about this issue, libertarians, you should be participating in this process. *(Time expired)*