



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

SPEECH

Wednesday, 6 February 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Bernardi, Sen Cory

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (09:31): I seek leave to make a brief personal explanation for three minutes as I claim to have been misrepresented.

Leave granted.

Senator BERNARDI: I rise as a result of a newspaper article written by Jessica Wright that appeared in the *Sun Herald* on Sunday, 27 January 2013. I would like to address the major points of this gross misrepresentation.

I was accused of being a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council. I dispute that and ALEC disputes it too. I would like to quote from a letter from the Director of International Relations at ALEC, sent to the Senators' Interests Committee and dated 31 January, which says:

Senator Bernardi has never paid us dues nor has he ever held a leadership position at ALEC. He has simply acted as a point of contact in Australia for our state legislator members ... Just as Senator Bernardi has never paid us dues, we have never compensated, sponsored or reimbursed Senator Bernardi for anything, including but not limited to travel. He has never attended any of our meetings or introduced policy at ALEC, and indeed, I have never even met him.

I have also been accused of failing to disclose a conflict of interest. This is false. The Clerk of the Senate states in a letter addressed to me:

None of the existing declarations under this provision —

that is, the 'catch-all' provision regarding conflict of interest—

appear to relate to mere 'involvement' with organisations.

The defamatory article continues by asserting that ALEC is working with the NRA to block action on US gun control. ALEC assert that this is false and they state:

The National Rifle Association is not a member of ALEC and we are not working with them to derail Australia's or US efforts at gun control.

The article also claims that ALEC is 'pro-tobacco'. According to ALEC:

We are not 'pro-tobacco', but we do support the protection of intellectual property rights.

This is a view which they are perfectly entitled to have and one that is shared by many in this parliament.

The article also asserts that the Heartland Institute paid for my accommodation and travel to the US on four separate occasions. This is completely false and is easily demonstrated by an inspection of my declaration of interests.

The journalist, Jessica Wright, also maintains that a spokesman from Senator Bernardi 'declined to comment on Saturday', being Australia Day, 26 January. This implies she spoke to one of my representatives. However, the only contact that was received by Jessica Wright was a message left on my office answering machine on a public holiday of a long weekend. Through her lawyers, Ms Wright and Fairfax maintain she spoke to a nameless woman in my electorate office on that day on two occasions. Anyone entering my office is required to deactivate the alarm with a unique code. The South Australia Police, who monitor this alarm, have provided evidence that no access to my office was made on that day. This means that Ms Wright supposedly spoke to a representative in my office who can bypass the SAPOL security system. Perhaps it is the same person that was on the grassy knoll in Dallas nearly 50 years ago.

In conclusion, this article is now in the hands of my lawyers, who are closely examining the allegations that have been made by the journalist and by some in this chamber who have made statements outside of this chamber and who have deliberately chosen to ignore the truth.