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ADDRESS TO ABC FRIENDS' FORUM

MELBOURNE

SATURDAY, 11 MAY 2019

Well good afternoon everybody, and first of all I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we meet. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

And I think that when we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, we should acknowledge they are Australia's first story-tellers, and we are determined they are able to keep telling their story on our ABC.

I am joined by my colleague, Tony Burke, our Shadow Minister for the Arts, for whom he and I will be doing our arts policy launch later today.

Senator Kristina Keneally and our candidate for Higgins, Fiona McLeod. Should I say the marginal seat of Higgins?

Now, this election is about the future of Australia, but at this election I would also put to you it is about the future of the ABC.

Now I know that the ABC matters to all of you here, but I also know it means so much to millions of our fellow Australians.

It matters because the ABC is part of the fabric of Australia. When you think about it, every day, 17 million of our fellow Australians, I would probably assume about 100 per cent of everyone here, consumes some form of ABC content each week.

When we think about it, cricket and football, the best coverage of women's sport, drama, comedy, home-grown and brilliant in its production and its delivery.

When you think about Playschool, my youngest daughter's favourite Behind The News, The Drum, the Prime Minister's least favourite QandA, why won't he go on it?

We think about the investigative journalism, the documentaries.

We think about all of the shows which provide us new insights into old faiths, into science, into history. Where we have been and where we are going as a nation.

For me, the ABC is about new generations falling in love with old favourites. On iView, the multichannels.

The ABC is our companion for long drives.

It is the friend for many older Australians late at night.

And the ABC is the lifeline of the bush. It is the most important, the most reliable source of information and emergency warnings in the worst of times.

It is why, at this election, Labor needs your help to save the ABC.

This is not an election where one can afford to sit on the sidelines and say there is no difference or there is nothing at stake.

We need you to vote for change.

We need you to vote for change to end the chaos of this chaotic Coalition who if they are re-elected will continue more of the same.

The new managing director of the ABC has made it crystal clear.

The Liberal cuts which are slated. They are part of their budget.

They've made it clear, the ABC, this will mean more job losses, it'll mean more closures, it'll mean more damage to the coverage of local news and sport.

It is as simple as this when you speak to your friends when you leave here. If you vote Liberal at the next election it'll be three more years of the last six years.

Three more years of the last six years, and of course, not to put too fine a point on it, but there are many in the ranks of the Liberal Party, not all, but many who will like to see the ABC privatised, they regularly declare this must happen, the hard right.

They regularly say that the ABC is wrong. They regularly attack the ABC, and as we have seen time and time again in this Government, what the hard right wants from the Liberal Prime Minister, the hard right gets from the Liberal Prime Minister.

If you don't believe me, let's all just send a big cheerio to Malcolm Turnbull watching this on iView in New York. But what is even more remarkable than the relentless attacks of the hard right, the relentless cuts of Liberal Governments, the relentless culture wars, the relentless attacks on the ABC's independence, the relentless attacks on ABC content, the relentless attack upon ABC journalists.

Is that despite all of this, the ABC is still more trusted than any other of our existing institutions.

This must drive to distraction those armchair warriors subscribing to The Spectator, subscribing to the IPA, shaking their head at how the ABC,

amongst all of the institutions in Australian civic life, still sail through the seas that come up against it, but there is a little bit of deterioration.

We must understand that whilst the ABC is more trusted and more loved than other civic institutions, it is under pressure relentlessly.

We live in an era of fake news.

We live in an era where science and evidence is only given the moral relative weight of half the argument and stupidity is weighed as equally as evidence in public discourse.

We live in a world where you can prove that climate change is real and therefore fifty per cent of the argument has to go to the people who say it's not real.

Facts are facts, truth is truth, science is science and we need an ABC which is not bullied or intimidated or cowed by a new era of institutionalised ignorance.

When George Orwell wrote 1984. Winston Smith heard one part, one part of the story.

That Big Brother was able to say great news, that the latest version of the dictionary had fewer words than the previous version of the dictionary, and you'd read this then and you thought this is, that Orwell very imaginative but prone to exaggeration.

He'd never heard of Twitter, even Orwell couldn't have invented 140 characters and the era of fake news in this country.

We need our ABC.

The ABC matters to me and it matters to my party, it matters to the Labor Party and the labour movement.

I haven't just come here to criticise the Government, as fun as that can be.

I came here to present the case for change.

What I want to do is tell this room, and through you, to millions of other people who care about policy, who care about the choices, and who care about a positive view for the future.

We will do more to make sure that the ABC is a well-funded, independent, public broadcaster consistent with its charter.

So, first things first, if we are elected next Saturday, we will put back the \$83.7 million dollars that this Government has cut in the last two budgets. All back. No arguments. Straight away. Save the jobs.

On top of this, we will put an additional \$10 million - and we have spoken to experts - this is not just what we think is a good idea, it is us talking with the people in the know what the ABC needs - we have consulted. \$10 million to boost resources for regional news and sports and emergency broadcasters.

Actually, we've got a few of these announcements, so you can contain that excitement. \$2 million to upgrade audio-description services for Australians who are blind or have poor vision.

And today, I am proud to announce further, we will put an additional \$40 million to support drama and comedy, new children's programming, more music content.

We'll make sure that B-1 never has to walk alone! They will always have B-2 funded.

And of course, SBS - which is, to my way of thinking, very important too - we will provide \$20 million to them too. Because we believe in public broadcasting in this country!

And I think, equally as important, perhaps not as immediately useful to the ABC, but I think even more important in the longer-term is, after speaking with people who care and love the ABC deeply - people who have worked

within its ranks, people who think about its future, Michelle Rowland and I are going to make clear today that we want to talk to the Board of the ABC and the new Managing Director.

We want to start the conversation about five-year funding, not three-year funding. Proper certainty locked away.

All elections are about choices. We choose to put more resources into the ABC.

These are modest injections. But I can already hear, now, telepathically, some of the big, non-government media organisations somehow saying that this is unfair.

Well, I have a message to them. We will make sure that a conservative government does not get re-elected, because we will make sure that neither you nor the right wing of the Liberal Party get their hands on the ABC. We are up for this fight.

And another thing I would say to those who hate the ABC - the ABC has a unique responsibility.

In my own mind, I call it "ABC Everywhere".

ABC's reach should be everywhere.

ABC should be available to everyone, everywhere.

ABC should reach everywhere not only in our cities, in our country, but in our region. In the Pacific.

Sharing and promoting and encouraging Australian values.

Now, a strong, quality independent national broadcaster does require resources.

Now, I can predict what my opponents - with their threadbare policy offering

for the next election - will say. They will say, "This is a cost."

I regard scarce and important taxpayer money expended on the ABC as an investment. This is the problem with these conservatives.

They know the price of everything, and the value of nothing!

Now, actually, I am not telepathic. I know what they will say. Because it is the same thing they say about everything else.

We want cheaper childcare for a million Australian families. "Too expensive for those families."

We want pensioners to access dental care through Medicare. "Too expensive," they cry.

We want better schools and hospitals.

We want better public transport in our cities. "Too expensive," they cry. "Too expensive."

They always say - the conservatives - "Australia can't afford it. Australia can't afford it," they say.

But I would like you to remember now, when you hear them say that Australia can't afford it, what they really mean is Australians don't deserve it.

They are happy to go soft on multinationals - large companies who pay no tax in Australia. They will tell you that is just the way of the world, it is all too hard.

They are happy to provide billions of dollars in subsidies to property investors to make losses.

They are happy to present income tax cheques back to people who have not paid income tax in that year - we can always afford all of that.

But when it comes to the childcare, the schools, the hospitals, the pensioners, the public transport - when it comes to the ABC - they say that we just cannot afford it.

In my party, we take a different view. And this is at the heart of the election. You are going to hear a lot in the next week. You have heard a lot in the last 30 days.

But it is about choices. It's about a vision.

I suspect many of you think that the political system is broken - that no great difference, and nothing changes with your vote. But you see, the things that you think are really important - just going backwards, deteriorating in status, decaying.

This is what has been happening with the ABC. The constant attacks - despite the trust in the ABC, the loss of morale, the politics at the very top. It has an impact over time.

We have an alternative vision - not just of the ABC, but of the nation.

I don't think the future is as hard as the government makes out.

I don't think that the nation cannot afford to provide equal treatment to women.

I don't think that the nation cannot afford to sort out people's penalty rates.

I don't think that the nation cannot afford to give our young people a leg up when they're buying their first home.

I don't think that this nation cannot afford to close the gap between our First Australians and other Australians.

I don't think that this country can find taking real action on climate change too hard.

It is the exact opposite. You and millions of Australians want to know there is a choice, you want to know there is a plan, you want to know there is a sense of the big picture.

We, in Labor, will help write a bigger story for Australia.

We are not afraid to say that equal treatment of our First Australians is a good thing.

We are not afraid to say that women and men should be paid the same thing.

We are not afraid to say there should be more women in Parliament.

We are not afraid to say that we will reform our tax system to stop rewarding those with vast masses of capital and make it harder for our fixed-income and income earners.

There are choices. And we don't think that tackling climate change is too hard. In fact, we think that, if this Government gets re-elected, we will lose another three years on these big debates.

This Government will always tell you what is wrong about us, but they have nothing good to say about themselves.

I said yesterday in Cairns, the Liberals have to lose an election to learn that climate change is real.

Today, here in Deakin Square here, today I say: the Liberals have to lose an election to learn, hands off the ABC!

Vote for change on May the 18th. Thank you very much.

