

From: [Conroy, Stephen \(Senator\)](#)
Sent: Wednesday, November 21, 2007 12:07 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: SBS and ABC policies

Thank you for your email setting out your concerns about the future of the SBS and the ABC.

Labor's SBS Policy

Labor considers the SBS an icon of Australian broadcasting. By providing both multicultural and multilingual broadcasts that aim to educate and entertain Australians of all backgrounds, the SBS plays an important social and cultural role in Australia and one that Labor champions.

Labor recognises that greater Commonwealth funding would assist the SBS to produce and broadcast more programs and news and current affairs bulletins for Australian viewers.

At its National Conference in April 2007, Labor acknowledged the importance of the SBS and committed Labor to ensuring adequate funding and support for the SBS to enable it to continue to provide Australians with high quality services, free from political and commercial interference.

In order to ensure the independence of the SBS, Labor will make sure that all future SBS Board candidates are selected on the basis of merit. Candidates will be considered by a panel established at arm's length from the Minister. The Minister will then appoint Board members from a short list prepared by the panel.

Labor has opposed and continues to oppose the decision by SBS to introduce in-program advertising.

SBS maintains that they can put advertisements into their programs without there needing to be a change to legislation.

Section 45 of the SBS Act 1991 provides for advertising only during periods before programs commence, after programs end, or during natural program breaks. Accordingly, Labor is concerned that the SBS's action may place it in breach of the Act.

I pursued this matter with SBS at Senate Estimates in October 2006 (see: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S9768.pdf>) and again at Senate Estimates in May 2007 (see: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S10314.pdf>).

Labor's ABC Policy

Labor considers the ABC to be one of Australia's most important cultural institutions. The ABC reports on all facets of Australian culture and is integral to the development of Australian culture and identity. Accordingly, it is vital that the ABC be unbiased in its approach to news and current affairs and that the ABC is not be run by Howard Government sympathisers who may use the ABC to promote the political agenda of the Government.

The ABC Board

The Howard Government's appointment of its mates to the ABC Board has seriously undermined its independence and integrity.

Labor is committed to a transparent process for appointments to the ABC board. Labor's policy is that:

- vacancies should be advertised;
- an independent selection panel to undertake a proper shortlist selection process;
- there should be clear merit based selection criteria;
- If the Minister does not appoint a short-listed candidate he or she will have to provide reasons for departing from the shortlist to Parliament; and

- the ABC Chairman is to be nominated by the Prime Minister and endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition.

To ensure the independence of the ABC Board, a Rudd Labor government will prohibit the appointment of any former politician or senior political staffer to the ABC Board.

Further, a Rudd Labor Government will restore the appointment of a staff-elected Director, so that there is a person on the Board with the expertise to question the advice coming from the ABC's executive.

Labor considers it crucial to return the ABC to its former state of independence, so as to enhance democracy by screening unbiased coverage of news and current affairs.

ABC Funding

In order to ensure that the ABC is in a position to continue as a broadcaster of national import and as a producer of fine Australian drama, news and current affairs programs, Labor is committed to ensuring adequate funding and support for the ABC.

The aim of such funding is to enable the ABC to continue to provide Australians with high quality broadcasting services, free from political and commercial interference and so that it is able to exploit the potential of new technology to deliver attractive and innovative content over digital television and the internet.

ABC and advertising

Labor is concerned by the ABC's new leaning towards commercialisation. It is Labor's position that it will not accept advertising on any part of the ABC, which includes ABC branded websites.

Should advertising be allowed on the ABC, it is likely that programming decisions would become more conservative and less innovative. Labor considers it critical that the ABC maintain its independence and that it is not swayed by advertising dollars.

Talking Books

Labor was concerned by the ABC's announcement in May 2007 that it would close down ABC Audio.

Labor appreciates that many vision impaired Australians rely on this service and understands the difficulties that vision impaired persons have in obtaining accessible reading material.

Accordingly, I raised the issue of the ABC ceasing to produce talking books at Senate Estimates in May.

A copy of the Estimates transcript may be reviewed at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S10314.pdf> (pages 63- 66).

Labor is firmly of the belief that the ABC must be maintained and promoted as a national asset. To this end, Labor will fight any attempt by the Government to undermine the importance or the independence of the ABC.

Thank you for raising these important issues with me.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Conroy
Shadow Minister for Communications and Information Technology
Deputy Opposition Leader in the Senate