

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 688#

Sussan Ley, Sarina Russo, 'Soft Lobbying' and the 'Future of the Government's (Education) Agenda.

The revelation of the questionable travel expenses of the Health Minister Sussan Ley (the member for Albury) to the Gold Coast since 2013 have exposed two additional and very interesting facts:

1. Firstly, her ability to purchase an investment property on the gold coast ' on 9 May 2015 *'on a whim'* with finance arranged beforehand, from childcare operator Martin Corkery, one of the Queensland Liberal National party's biggest individual donors in 2011. (*The Guardian* 11/01/2017). This puts Ley into the aspirational class of 'rent seekers' at a time when millennials are increasingly frozen out of the housing market by investors using negative gearing.
2. Secondly, and more relevantly, Ley has explained that two trips she claimed over New Year's Eve in 2013 and 2014 were "at the invitation of a prominent Queensland businesswoman" **to discuss the Coalition's agenda for education and training.** Simon Birmingham, the Federal Minister for Education defended Ley, telling Radio National that he *'did not believe she had breached the ministerial code of conduct and extensive travel was a clear part of her responsibilities.'* (*The Guardian*)

This businesswoman was Sarina Russo. Like Mrs Rudd, this lady made her multi-millions out of the privatisation of the once well run Commonwealth Employment service (CES) in the 1990s. The marketization and privatisation of this once estimable public service has resulted in the highest youth unemployment rate since the 1930s depression. And here we have Sussan Ley, justifying her taxpayer funded travel to a 'business lunch' and an 'annual New Year's Eve event' to have *'business conversations ..(that)..were important conversations to the future of our government's agenda'*. (*Financial Review*, 10/01/2017 p.1)

DOGS pose the following questions:

- Why is Sarina Russo 'soft- lobbying' Sussan Ley about education and training? What does she want?
- Does she, as a multi-millionaire (millions made from what was once a Commonwealth service) want to make further millions out of the further privatisation of the TAFE Sector? Or
- Does she, as a multi-millionaire have an eye on American developments and charter schools for Australia ?
- Are government policies made in response to 'soft lobbying'.

What exactly is Soft Lobbying ?

Some insight into the way the ‘business class’ looks at the way decisions are made in government is found in a fascinating article which appeared in *The Age* of Thursday January 12, 2017, p. 4 of the News section. The article by Melissa Singer is entitled *A Minister in the marquee trumps any D-list celebs*.

The particular Coalition minister in the Melbourne Cup marquee was not Sussan Ley, but Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. Melissa Singer argued that the most widely published non-equine photo of the recent Melbourne Cup was the Foreign Minister when she ‘ had a brief tete-a-tête with mining magnate and social recluse Gina Rinehart!

So now we know how government business is really done in Australia these days. Melissa Singer continues with the following rationale given by our politicians for rubbing shoulders with the REAL power in our so-called democracy.

At the time Ms Bishop told Melissa that attending events such as the Melbourne Cup was
‘All part of the job. Being at the Cup is the most fantastic networking opportunity – everyone in Australia you want to see is there’.

A former senior government adviser said there was a value in politicians being in the same room (or tent) as the nation’s business leaders.

The opportunity for ‘soft lobbying’ was highly valuable .and Politicians usually got to see the guest list so they know who will likely target them for a ‘pullaside’ diplo-speak for a quiet chat.

So, ‘soft-lobbying’ is ‘pull-aside’ of politicians by the powerful and wealthy - diplo-speak for a ‘quiet chat’.

This is how our so-called democracy is now working, with politicians leaving behind the welfare of the majority as they go round in ever smaller circles with the ‘right’ people in the ‘right’ network – at taxpayers’ expense And this is how the Coalition’s education agenda is influenced.

Is it any wonder that voters are deserting the major parties for fringe dwellers on the political spectrum as they hope against hope, that such people might see their legitimate concerns as important ?

DOGS SUGGEST THAT POLITICIANS STOP LISTENING TO THEIR WEALTHY FRIENDS LOOKING FOR A QUICK BUCK AT THE EXPENSE

OF OUR NATION'S CHILDREN AND GO BACK TO EDUCATIONAL
BASICS FOR A DEMOCRATIC NATION: A HEALTHY PUBLIC SYSTEM
OF EDUCATION. AND A GENUINELY INDEPENDENT ONE.

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