



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
PROOF
ADJOURNMENT
COVID-19: China
SPEECH

Tuesday, 12 May 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 12 May 2020 Page 114 Questioner Speaker Fierravanti-Wells, Sen Concetta</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS (New South Wales) (20:43): Post Wuhan coronavirus, Australians do not want 'business as usual' with the communist regime in China. The billions of dollars being expended to counter the pandemic is borrowed money which we, the taxpayers, must repay. These costs are a direct consequence of the CCP's wrongful acts, and accordingly, Australians expect reparations. As I have been advocating since early April, it is important for Australia to act upon those things which are within its control, namely a plan for reparations and a plan to decouple from China.

This will require a great deal of political fortitude. Regrettably, I suspect we have a long way to go in this regard. Let's not forget that only a year ago our government allowed three Chinese warships to sail into Sydney Harbour on the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. This was at a time when the CCP was harassing Royal Australian Navy vessels innocently transiting on a visit to Vietnam, and against the background of China's bellicose and illegal actions in the South China Sea and the CCP's constant harassment of those exercising freedom-of-navigation operations.

On reparations, it is incumbent on the government to investigate all possible ways to recover damages for health costs and damage to our economy. It is most likely we will go into recession, with enormous loss of jobs and livelihoods.

The culpability of the CCP has been articulated in a recent report by leading UK think tank the Henry Jackson Society entitled *Coronavirus Compensation*. It states that, had China provided accurate information at an early juncture, 'the infection would not have left China'. Instead, the CCP covered it up and punished the doctors who sought to tell the truth. The massive underreporting of cases, the attempts to rewrite the narrative, the lies and the cover-up all support culpability of the CCP. The Henry Jackson report canvasses a breach of the WHO International Health Regulations and suing China for \$6.5 trillion. The WHO regulations were adopted in 1969 to prevent the international spread of disease by placing an obligation on states to prevent highly transmittable diseases. They were revised in 2005 after SARS, but the CCP did not learn the lessons from SARS and repeated previous blunders.

On 31 December 2019, Taiwan Centers for Disease Control notified the WHO of human-to-human transmission of the virus. Because of the One China policy, Taiwan's warnings were ignored. On 14 January, the WHO instead tweeted there was no human-to-human transmission, based on information from the CCP. Indeed, WHO director-general Tedros stated:

... China is actually setting a new standard for outbreak response.

The absurdity of the WHO's conduct was seen when its assistant director-general Aylward wouldn't even acknowledge Taiwan's existence in an interview, and this demonstrated the failure of the WHO, in tandem with China, to stop the epidemic.

But, then, let us not forget that China has been the source of numerous pandemics. An article entitled 'Made in China', about the BRI, the modern-day Silk Road, and the black plague, by Rebecca Weisser in *The Spectator* on 7 March, traces this history. The Black Death, like coronavirus, was made in China. It is no coincidence that the worst outbreaks in the Middle East and Europe have been in Iran and Italy; each is the anchor of the Belt and Road initiative—the 21st century version of the Silk Road. The article outlines China as the source of other outbreaks: the plague of Justinian in 541, the Spanish flu in 1919, the Asian flu, the Hong Kong flu, the avian flu, SARS and now coronavirus. Why?

One theory is that the virus started in a Wuhan wet market, a cross between a zoo and a slaughterhouse. After each outbreak, China says it will crack down on the illegal trade of wildlife, but it doesn't. The CCP places higher priority on suppression of criticism against it than on food safety regulations. Perhaps if China spent more on

revamping its scandal-riddled healthcare sector and less on pursuing its illegal and bellicose actions in the South China Sea, its people would enjoy a far better quality of life.

Another theory is it originated in a laboratory. Recent media stories have highlighted the possible role of the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Recently, I read a translation of a speech given to a select group of high-level CCP officials by Chi Haotian, China's defence minister from 1993 to 2003 and vice-chairman of its Central Military Commission. His chilling reference to 'using non-destructive weapons that can kill many people', and 'rapid development of modern biological technology and new bio-weapons' puts the recent outbreak in a more sinister light. Irrespective of the theories, the origin of the virus was China, and China remains responsible for the outbreak.

Post pandemic, we need to overhaul our critical infrastructure and foreign investment framework. Critical infrastructure legislation needs to be extended beyond ports and the utilities of gas, water and electricity to include other key sectors, such as banking and finance, food, grocery and agriculture, health and medical, transport, communications and IT, and airports. In so doing, we must expand restrictions to ensure practical ways to protect our sovereignty. This includes revisiting the decision to lease the Port of Darwin, especially given the change to security circumstances. It should never have been leased to Landbridge, given its close ties to the CCP. I started questioning Defence officials about this at estimates last year. The recent FIRB changes announced by the Treasurer are only a start, with examination of further limitations and broader interpretation of the national interest required. Reciprocity of acquisition is also important. If Australians or Australian entities are restricted from acquiring assets in China, then why should the CCP or its state owned entities be given free rein to acquire even more strategic assets in Australia?

In January 2018, I drew attention to China's activities, especially in the Pacific. My prescient warnings have been fully vindicated. Following this, an international debate ensued about debt-trap diplomacy and the strategy used by the CCP to lure countries to borrow large amounts for infrastructure projects, usually on a debt-for-equity basis. When the loan can't be repaid, the CCP takes the equity, ending up owning the asset.

I am concerned that the CCP is taking advantage of the pandemic to further its insidious debt-trap diplomacy by taking advantage of economically stressed nation-states through the Belt and Road Initiative. 'BRI' is code for debt-trap diplomacy—a warning that Premier Andrews has failed to heed. There is a concern that when companies are financially stressed, like Virgin airlines, we must guard against predatory behaviour and bargain hunting by totalitarian regimes like CCP and their state-owned entities. Our security and sovereignty are at risk, and we should be reducing, not increasing, such controls over key assets.

Over a quarter of our two-way trade is with the CCP. Those resisting decoupling argue exports are at risk. The CCP may not like us or trust us, but it will continue to buy goods vital to China's economic growth and those which will help feed its 1.3 billion people, because we are a reliable source of high-quality and well-priced goods. Our top imports from China include a whole raft of everyday items. We must reduce our dependency on China, become more self-reliant and diversify our trade. The pandemic has shown our overdependence on overseas supply chains, especially in medical supplies. The barley dispute and today's delisting by China of four abattoirs are symptomatic of the predicament Australia has now found itself in, although some argue it has been brewing for some time.

Those leading our 'fellow traveller' foreign policy over many years, including those doing business with the CCP, have preferred to turn a blind eye to its skulduggery, so long as the 'rivers of gold' continued to flow. This includes some of our major universities. Overly dependent on overseas students and substantial funding from the presence of Confucius Institutes, they have clearly not followed the teachings of their own business schools in practising diversification. The recent threats by the Chinese ambassador are symptomatic of the predicament we have placed ourselves in where we are vulnerable to economic coercion.

In conclusion, Australians will now expect their government to demonstrate the necessary political fortitude to focus on those issues within our power to control—namely, a plan for reparations and a plan to decouple from China.