

Charlie Lewis (00:11)

Hi, and welcome to Cut Through Crikey's spin-free analysis of Australian news, politics, and power. I'm Charlie Lewis, Crikey's reporter at large. I'm tagging in for the wonderful Rachel Withers, and between the two of us, we are doing our very best to fill in for the irreplaceable Crystal Andrews.

We are going to be dealing this week with the return to parliament. So that will give us plenty of parliamentary tactics, culture warring, and maybe even some legislation to get into.

Thankfully, I'm not undertaking this by myself. I am delighted to be joined by our two guests. Anton Nilsson, Crikey's politics reporter. Anton, welcome.

Anton (00:48)

Thanks very much.

Charlie Lewis (00:50)

and if that weren't thrilling enough, we are joined once again by Tina Quinn, writer, broadcaster, host of two S D R's Fourth Estate and regular Crikey contributor. Tina, thank you so much for coming back.

Tina Quinn (01:01)

Hi Charlie, thanks for having me.

Charlie Lewis (01:02)

So we've got a lot to potentially get into this week, but probably what seems to be shaping up as the major legislative focus for the week to come is the government's proposed digital duty of care. Communications Minister Annika Wells is going to address the National Press Club about this later this week. But a lot of debate has already been taking place around this law, which would, among other things, allow people to opt out of social.

media algorithms and place a greater onus on those platforms to protect children from harm. Now the coalition have already kicked up a big fuss about this a few times. It's been it's been mooted for a while. But Tina, the reporting coming into this week indicates that Labour feel pretty confident that they're going to be able to get it over the line. What was this major sticking point and and what's changed, if anything?

Tina Quinn (01:53)

I think the the significant development is that Labour appears to have recognized that that giving the minister discretion to expand the definition of online harm was i pretty politically difficult defend.

And look, there is a legitimate argument about whether an individual minister should have that much discretion. I completely agree with that, but I think the coalition has, of course, taken that

concern and turned it into a much broader argument that the government is somehow trying to censor political speech by doing this

I think what's interesting is that Labor seems to be prepared to remove the most contentious provision while retaining the central premise of the legislation that digital platforms should have a responsibility to prevent foreseeable harm. And I think that shifts the pressure back onto the coalition.

Because if the provision they objected to is removed, they haven't really got much to object to in terms of holding these companies accountable.

Charlie Lewis (03:06)

And guess before we get into that, this initial argument about censorship, as you say, there is something to the level of

the level of worry that kind of is expressed with that level of power being invested in a single minister. but what kind of material was kind of at risk of being captured by that provision? were they what was the worry of censorship kind of pointing towards?

Tina Quinn (03:27)

Well, the coalition's central objection was a provision in the exposure draft which would have allowed the communications minister to expand the categories of online harm that was covered by the legislation through regulation. So the

the coalition argued that this handed the government excessive discretion over lawful speech and it could lead to political censorship. but as I said, Labour's now reportedly prepared to remove that provision to secure support in the Senate.

So we'll just see whether the coalition is then gonna reverse its opposition to that. think what's important here as well is that we need to be careful about accepting this framing that any attempt to regulate social media amounts to censorship because we regulate industries all the time when their products or business practices could create foreseeable harm. And I think the fundamental question here is why some of the wealthiest and most powerful companies in the world should be exempt from comparable responsibilities. Now that

I don't think that means that there shouldn't be safeguards for legitimate speech or journalism or like political debate. I think there should, but I think giving people the choice not to have an algorithm determine what they see is almost the opposite of censorship. It's about returning some control to the individual, I would say. I mean I do think there's one other point that I kinda keep swirling around in my head is that

the algorithm has been deciding for many users and social media users what they see, but the algorithm is also determined by what they're attracted to, right? so,

I mean, in a sense, giving them back control themselves is them I I guess the individual is then able to I guess choose what they see and what they consume with more intention.

Even though like I I'm not sure if it's gonna amount to a huge amount of difference because again, the algorithm is feeding what it knows that individual is is going to want to consume.

Charlie Lewis (05:20)

I suppose that the hope is partly that it stops suggesting ever more incrementally extreme

Tina Quinn (05:25)

Hmm.

Charlie Lewis (05:25)

material and within an hour suddenly you're you're looking at men's rights activists, yeah.

Tina Quinn (05:28)

Indeed. In

indeed. I would like to think that this, you know, could create better outcomes for for social media users and for democracy and for public and social discourse. But I don't like to get my hopes too high on things like this. We'll see.

Charlie Lewis (05:45)

the framing is interesting from see a lot of reporting now that it's the Liberal Party's kind of innate, I would think it was ab abhorrence of any any law that regulates free speech, which is kind of interesting after several years of of sort of interventions in terms of the right to protest, in terms of for example, the anti-Semitism envoys proposals around

academia and art and and journalism, they didn't seem as worried about the regulation of of free speech in those issues. But I wouldn't want to

Tina Quinn (06:12)

No, the the coalition

has always picked and choosed when it comes to free speech what they actually how willing they are to defend it and what they actually mean by their concerns around free speech. I think they've always had a bit of a finicky relationship with that. Mercurial. Mercurial,

Charlie Lewis (06:27)

Yes, yes.

Anton (06:27)

I've all I've I've struggled to understand

Tina Quinn (06:29)
I would say. Sorry.

Charlie Lewis (06:30)
Yeah.

Anton (06:31)
I've struggled to understand the how it's censorship because I I was because it seems like and maybe I've taken it too lightly, but it's seems like it's about giving know more options to users of these platforms.

know, forcing the social media platforms to give more options.

if you look at the

at Labor's press release about it. there's a bit about requiring platforms to protect kids under 18 from harmful content. And I guess that's a kind of limitation of speech, or at least the free flow of information. I particularly noted that one of the examples they gave of harmful content was content that glorifies life endangering stunts.

as a fan of skateboarding clips and some cliff diving content.

Charlie Lewis (07:17)
Yeah.

Anton (07:18)
Could possibly apply to me.

so I guess that would impinge my possibly my my freedom of information. But I don't see how that's about my freedom of speech though. That's what I don't really understand. I also wanted to ask you, Charlie, what you think of then you know how names have like a catchy nickname.

And this one is called My Feed My Way. And you're a Frank Sinatra fan, I know, so maybe you'd like the title of the bill.

Charlie Lewis (07:41)
And and as a true Frank Sinatra fan, I think My Way is one of his worst songs. So I'm I'm always annoyed to be reminded of it. But it's got it's got a certain certain music to it, I think it kind of works.

Tina Quinn (07:51)
Didn't know you were a Sinatra fan?

Charlie Lewis (07:53)

yeah, I feel like this is probably not the the format

Tina Quinn (07:55)

Ha ha ha.

Charlie Lewis (07:56)

to really get into it in the level that I'd like to, but

Tina Quinn (07:59)

Ha ha ha.

Charlie Lewis (08:00)

speaking of things from the United States and this is the kind of brilliant segues that I'm renowned for.

Tina Quinn (08:04)

What a segue.

Charlie Lewis (08:07)

there's a there's an issue that's coming that's gonna possibly bring a lot of the stuff that we're talking to kind of to a head because the US has already made kind of what's been described as a fairly extraordinary intervention in in this legislation, trying to demand that the government exclude US platforms from this laws, which of course anyone with any passing understanding of these things would know would render the laws essentially meaningless.

I guess there's there's there's a few things in this. One, is there any indication that either of you seen that the the government intends to water down a legislation along those lines and or have we actually found something where government might actually push back against an American request?

Tina Quinn (08:43)

I think it's pretty extraordinary that the US would intervene in another country's

domestic legislative process to effectively demand that their tech companies be exempt from Australian law. It shouldn't be that surprising. I mean,

US imperialism has loomed large across much of the world, I guess. So it's not the biggest shock in the world. But I think it's particularly revealing when you consider that the companies we're talking about are some of the biggest players in the market. And I think exempting them would render much of the legislation meaningless.

Really. I mean Albanese he has publicly pushed back, which is encouraging, but the the real test is I think what ends up in the legislation and whether the government is prepared to enforce it. So I think it's going to look very interesting once it does make it through the Senate. I mean,

th there's also just a broader issue here about sovereignty. Australia should be able to determine what protections that we have online without having those decisions dictated by

basically the commercial interests of American tech companies.

that's what it is. I mean it's it's their commercial interests over our sovereignty and our our safety, our online safety.

Anton (09:54)

with the teen social media ban and the news bargaining incentive, we've seen the Albanese government kind of willing to at least in theory stand up to these

big ma American tech interests.

And they obviously have huge backing from the government there, especially during this administration. So there's a lot of heavy pressure being applied. And when it came came to the news bargaining incentive, the tech lobby in the US, called it a tax. And the government of the US at one point said it was foreign extortion. some pretty

heavy language being used. but it's not the first time they've come up against this immense force in in in America with with these kinds of online focused bills in Australia.

Charlie Lewis (10:40)

And of course we've got quite a big test of a few of these issues coming up in December.

the US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, has announced that the US intends to live stream the execution of a the Fort Hood shooter when it takes place in December. And of course there's been a huge debate around

whether the Australian government will allow that to be screened or be broadcast in Australia. And of course the Greens want this footage essentially blocked.

This does actually bring us to the Greens, which is the other kind of interesting element of this

this week's sitting week. Before we kind of get into the the the issues around their leadership, Anton, they've obviously also expressed kind of reservations about the digital duty of care, but but obviously as you would expect in a different manner than the Liberals have. Anton, what what what did you make of the the nature of their their criticisms?

Anton (11:25)

the Liberals felt that the plan on the digital duty of care went too far, and the Greens think that it doesn't go far enough. the Greens want individuals to be able to sue tech platforms for breaching the proposed duty and

For the fines to be much higher.

Tina Quinn (11:42)

well, I think there's there's an opportunity for the Greens to make an argument that goes well beyond the traditional progressive electorate because people across the political spectrum are frustrated with the power of these companies, whether that's you know, the impact of social media on their kids or the way that algorithms shape what they see, or just the complete lack.

Of accountability when something does go wrong. And I think the Greens are identifying something important here that regulation is only as meaningful as its enforcement. So, you

know, if someone has suffered demonstrable harm, you know, why shouldn't they have an avenue to to seek compensation? You know, why should enforcement rest entirely with a regulator? We don't have the greatest history in this country of

sort of powerful regulators. They've, you know, proven to be fairly toothless. And I think the comparison with other industries is useful because we don't generally accept that enormous corporations can operate without legal consequences when their when their practices do cause harm. So I think there's a broader political opportunity here for the Greens to perhaps present themselves as standing up for ordinary consumers against, you know, a concentrated sort of corporate power.

so I think they could, you know, possibly appeal to more than just their their usual sort of progressive electorate.

Charlie Lewis (13:00)

Lead us very neatly onto the question of the way that the Greens sort of handle themselves going forward in this particular week because obviously this is the first sitting week which we've had the new leadership. Senator David Shoebridge, who took over from Larissa Waters, who had to stand down quite suddenly due to health issues.

So Anton, you interviewed Shoebridge very soon after he became leader. and I suppose we can get into a lot of what you guys talked about, but do you get the sense that their approach to, for example, this issue is a good indicator of of what we can expect from them in the coming weeks under his leadership?

Anton (13:37)

not sure if it does, but for what it's worth, the Greens communications spokesperson, s Sarah Hanson Young, was the one who outlined the changes the party wanted to make to the bill yesterday. So

I guess that suggests that Shoebridge will let his spokespeople do their job and speak. you know, he's one of his portfolios is digital rights, so

I guess they kind of have some some overlap there. And he's definitely not been silent on this issue either. But Hanson Young said that these fines if you breach this proposed duty of care, it has to hit the bottom line of the social media giants. the bottom line for a company like Meta was nearly sixteen billion US dollars.

as of earlier this year. So if a fine were to be felt by them it would have to be enormous.

Charlie Lewis (14:28)

I suppose the common accusation, whether it was fair or not, against the Greens under under waters was that she took this very constructive but quiet kind of approach and it it blunted their ability to have cut through on on particular issues. And I'm really interested, kind of from your conversation with Shoebridge, where you think the Greens think they're on to a winner. obviously Tina talked before about how

the issue of big tech is somewhere where they feel that they can get cut through on a wider audience than would normally respond to their their policies. I I saw that Shoe Bridge's first question as leader was regarding wages and how little they've moved since twenty eleven. Is that a bit of a sense, do you think, Anton, that this is that the the the the approach will be more material, more concrete and less to do with cultural issues or

Where did Cheebridge kind of indicate that they went?

Anton (15:15)

one thing that stuck out to me when I interviewed Shoebridge was or actually stuck out me beforehand, is he immediately when he became leader started using this phrase the one percent quite often. which I assume is, you know, Bernie Sanders inspired. you know the idea that nine nine percent of people are worse off than the top

most powerful enrich one percent basically. And Shoebridge said that the use of the phrase was part of a messaging overhaul that they'd started working on months prior. And then when the leadership change happened suddenly, guess he felt that that was a opportune moment to to roll that messaging out and start hammering home that message. if we think about the digital duty of care bill.

it fits into that in the sense that you social media companies are portrayed as the big bad elite institutions oppressing the Australian masses, I suppose. And in this sitting week so far, you've seen other comments by Schubert where you can see the same tendency. For example, he called out this labor-controlled joint AI committee earlier today that

he said was a stitch up and that labor was trying to pretend to do something by AI but not willing to challenge, you call the US billionaire controlled industry. I think if you're the Greens under Shoopers you can probably make anything fit under this banner of like the elite versus the the majority.

I think that is probably a pretty useful framing to look at their rhetoric through.

Charlie Lewis (16:36)

famously he announced, we're not here to improve labor, we're here to replace them. does that more aggressive tone kind of relate to that as well?

Anton (16:45)

I guess that's the challenge of being the Greens these days because you have one nation trying to steal your spot as the or probably they already have succeeded as the third party for for people who don't want to vote for the the big ones.

I'm not sure exactly what the strategy is there. I feel like a they kind of did try that a little bit under band, didn't they? With Max Channel Madder kind of going on the attack against Alban Isig frequently in the lower house and I guess they must think that's winning strategy. I this sense in Shoebridge that Labor is not

able to reform that they're you know essentially like beyond repair fr in his view. That does seem like something I'd recognize in him. I've known Shubrich in a professional capacity since maybe twenty twenty or something like that, because I used to cover the New South Wales Parliament and he was up an upper house MP there. around the same time as I started working at Craikkey, he

became a senator so in both parliaments I've had you know had the opportunity to interview him and stuff like that. So feel like he is this is before he became leader obviously because w I think it's too early to say what kind of leader he's gonna be, but in both places he's been a pretty similar politician, I think. he's very effective in messaging. He's

really keen to grill people in estimates and committees and stuff like that. I think that's where he's most comfortable probably. I think it's more focused on social and governance issues than environmentalism, which is something we probably associate with the Greens a lot. not to say he doesn't care about that, but I I I feel like governance and social issues is probably stuff that fires up him up more. And

This idea that Labour is not not a party that the Greens can collaborate with. I feel like that's know, I asked him about that too. I said in Europe there's plenty of examples of green red coalition, Labour Green coalition governments. And he says in response to that that, you know, Labour refuses to work with us, basically.

I mean you can read his full comic, but essentially that's what it boils

down to.

Tina Quinn (18:48)

there's I I think a real reluctance in this country to you know, the way a lot of European parliaments run is so kind of foreign to them. I mean mean I know we actually have a coalition, like you know, we've had coalition governments, you know, the Libs and the Nats, but that's an agreement that's been around decades upon decades and it still operates in a very different way to how you would see in different European parliaments.

you know, if you look to somewhere like Germany or Sweden, I mean those coalition governments are made up usually of many different voices. I think that's quite foreign to us here in in Australia. We're yeah, we're not very

Anton (19:21)

Yeah, I agree.

Tina Quinn (19:23)

So there's real opposition to our parliaments and our governments forming in that way. even though you

Anton (19:29)

Yeah.

Tina Quinn (19:30)

it it could be a much more collaborative thing.

Anton (19:32)

It's true. And I guess like as a foreigner, I'm like, why couldn't Greens and Labour hash out an agreement where they sh they take power

Tina Quinn (19:39)

Yeah, yeah. Hmm.

Anton (19:41)

together if if that's what's required to get enough seats? To me that's like, not outside the realm of possibility, I suppose.

Tina Quinn (19:47)

thought the twenty twenty two election, at one point it did seem like Labour might form minority government, which is not what happened. And I thought it would be really interesting if they were sort of forced to enter into a power sharing agreement with the Greens. And also then the teals, because they were taking a number of seats. And I thought that could have been a very interesting arrangement. But alas.

Charlie Lewis (20:06)

It does, I guess both of the teals and one nation that you you referenced there, it does sort of point to the dilemma that that that faces the Greens now and that they've perhaps been around

a bit too long. They've become a party kind of that feels of the establishment no matter no matter how they portray themselves. an interesting just as an aside, I I recently went to Philip Island in the electorate of of Bath for the one of the first candidate forums that they're holding for the coming state election in Victoria.

It's the it's the tightest seat, or at least it was the last time I had, it was decided roughly by two hundred votes. and I spoke to the Victorian Socialists candidate down there, who this is the first time that they've run. He had previously run as a Greens candidate, and he kind of said this wasn't why he went to the socialists, but one of the things he said as an aside was

After so much what he calls like negative propaganda about the Greens in Australia, he now finds door knocking as a socialist, he gets a better hearing than he did

as a Greens candidate. And and if that's true, that is a very worrying state of affairs for for the Greens.

Tina Quinn (21:01)
That's extraordinary.

Charlie Lewis (21:03)
which, and you know, I did want to get into this with you because I feel like you're a very s very assiduous reporter on

on on the on the media and how it kind of shapes his narratives and we'll we'll get into some of your great reporting recently in a second, but there is a bit of a sense that the Greens role is a little bit locked in amber. It's sort of stuck in this certain image that it can't seem to shift out is there anything that the Greens can do to kind of shift out of that and become and sort of reinvent themselves again as an outsider or at least as an alternative party? and if so, how do they do that?

Tina Quinn (21:32)
look, I think that they can, but I also do think there's a responsibility on us in the media, and I, you know, include myself in that and and other outlets and other reporters and journalists in in terms of how we cover the greens. guess there's been an almost immediate narrative that David Shoebridge is going to be, you know, more difficult for Labour than, say, Larissa Waters, that, you know, he's more

Combative and he's more confrontational, and that Albanese's legislative agenda is therefore going to become harder to get through. and of course, there's the comparisons again with Adam Bant, but if you actually look at the legislative record under Adam Bant, who had that sort of similar characterization as being an obstructionist, the Greens actually worked with Labour on a considerable amount of legislation and

When you look at reforms that didn't progress, particularly around political integrity and and transparency, in several cases it wasn't the Greens who actually stood in the way there. It was Labour's reluctance to negotiate without coalition support. So I think that there's a broader problem with the way that we frame the Greens. We we tend to judge them by, you know, whether they're making life difficult for Labour rather than whether the changes they're actually demanding might produce better legislation.

the Greens definitely need to take some responsibility for their own messaging, of course, like one hundred percent. But I'd I would like to see a little less focus on whether Shoebridge is going to be a thorn in Albanese's side and perhaps a little more scrutiny of the substance of what he's actually proposing, what Shoebridge is actually proposing. the measure

to me of an effective opposition or crossbench shouldn't be how agreeable they are to the government. It should be whether they actually are improving public policy. I mean, that is the point of them,

Charlie Lewis (23:20)

speaking of ineffective oppositions there's also the coalition to talk about

Tina Quinn (23:25)

You are just blowing away the the segues

today. I love it.

Charlie Lewis (23:30)

Anton, has Liberal Party leader Angus Taylor, in your view, has he managed to be difficult for Labour? Has he managed to land a glove on Labour in the lead up to this this this sitting week?

Anton (23:40)

it both question times so far he's hammered them on small businesses and yesterday he he said that labor was waging a war on small businesses

was trying to look it up. I think if I read the stats right, there's about two million self employed people in Australia. I guess it's sizable portion of voters. it's probably smart of the coalition to try to woo them. I don't know if they vote as a block. I suppose you could try to like inspire that, encourage small business owners to think of themselves

as such when they vote. It seems like something he's very that he clearly thinks is is a good attack line. I also don't know if question time questions are effective in in achieving anything. I don't know if they used to be more so and now they're not or if

or if they're s very important I just don't get it but I don't know.

Charlie Lewis (24:51)

I don't find that I'm generally stopped at parties to be asked about Jim Chalmers' question time performance. you know, i even people who will indulge me on on my job won't ask me about that. I don't know about you guys.

Tina Quinn (25:04)

No, not really. Not really. I think maybe once upon a time when we had less choice in terms of what we watched, you

Charlie Lewis (25:11)

Yeah.

Tina Quinn (25:11)

know, I I knew a number of people. I knew a number of people that made time in their day to watch question time and to tune in. But I think it's it's it's a dwindling audience, to say the least.

Charlie Lewis (25:21)

We've also had

former Treasurer Josh Freidenberg back in the news over the last week or so, primarily kind of attached to his new memoir that's coming out. but of course that has inevitably been attended with, and I would say probably attended with chatter that has not been discouraged by Freidenberg about the possibility that he might return to Parliament and perhaps end up leading the Liberal Party.

this is one for both of you, but maybe I'll I'll go with you first, Tina. What what what do you make of this? Laura Party clearly needs needs something. It is it is flatlining at the moment, is this what it needs?

Tina Quinn (26:25)

Is this what it needs? Is Josh the answer? he's pretty keen to to be the comeback kid. He has been for a while. I mean, how many times I don't know. How many times are we going to be subjected to the the great Josh Freidenberg comeback story? I mean, this is not the first time that we've heard murmurs of this.

I mean, he's, you know, he's been out of parliament now for four years, and it feels like

Every year since we've been treated to another round of speculation about his imminent return. He's certainly been canvassing for it. know, and now conveniently there's a book to to promote. So look, I f I think it's fairly obvious that Freidenberg wants to keep himself in the political arena and the conversation. He's doing the interviews, he's offering, I think, quite unsolicited advice to the Liberal Party. He's floating policy ideas, he's

telling everybody the party needs to change, but he's, you know, still get to to commit to actually running. It it all seems like he's trying to sort of take the temperature. But I just I don't know if

another white guy is the answer for them, especially someone that, was was very active in terms of opposing

the introduction of quotas as Freidenberg was, as Angus Taylor was. look, he obviously left the Liberal Party before the the sort of postmortem of the twenty twenty two election was handed down. but I can't see him agreeing to to many of the suggestions that were were in that post mortem.

I mean, I find it really extraordinary about the way sections of and I and I do mean sections of the political media who do indulge this. You know, we're discussing him as like a prospective leader of the Liberal Party when he hasn't even you kind of need to demonstrate that you can win your seat back first, right? And we should also remember that he wasn't some innocent bystander to the Morrison government's failures. He was the treasurer and one of its most senior figures, and he was part of

the government that really lost those traditional liberal heartland seats in the first place. I mean, he he lost his seat to Atial to to Monique Ryan. So I don't know, I think there's a certain amount of historical revisionism involved in presenting him as the answer to the very problems that he helped preside over. And meanwhile, you know, poor Angus Taylor has to stand there, want to say welking welcoming him back, but

I don't know, it's interesting seeing the way that he sort of kind of manoeuvres around this while Freienberg's on a book tour. it's almost like he's using this book tour to launch a leadership campaign from outside parliament.

Anton (29:00)

if you think he's not capable of all that, I have a two word response Tim Wilson.

Tina Quinn (29:05)

Mm.

Anton (29:06)

I'm just joking, obviously, but you know. but you know

Tina Quinn (29:07)

Why is it always white I Why is it always a white guy?

Anton (29:13)

sh Shadow Treasurer lost the seat

Tina Quinn (29:16)

Mm.

Anton (29:16)

to to a teal, came back. maybe Friday

could do it too.

Tina Quinn (29:20)

That's true. I mean, I

think that's yeah, exactly. I mean, that's a much more plausible option. I mean, he actually launched a successful political comeback. I don't think Josh Ridenberg exactly knows where to start, which is why he's written a book. Stay tuned.

Anton (29:32)

Is it possible that

he's not aiming to become the new leader of the Liberal Party, but rather one of those kind of elder statesmen people like all the former Liberal prime ministers who constantly talk to the media and express their opinions about what Liberals and others should should do?

Tina Quinn (29:50)

look, I think it's it's pretty clear the way he's briefed a lot of journalists and media. like a lot of these stories, you know, that you see, for instance, from Philip Curry and the AFR and a lot of these stories that that appear feel very

feel very like a a testing of the waters of whether there's an appetite to to sort of have him back. It it feels

Anton (30:10)

Yeah.

Tina Quinn (30:11)

like he's really trying to launch a comeback. The the way that journalists are being proved. Hmm.

Anton (30:13)

That's true. And they do often do that the test balloon thing where they kind of like float

something and see how the reaction is and then they don't actually say what it is they were trying to do so they don't have to own it if it fails.

Tina Quinn (30:26)

I mean I'm I'm

not inside his brain, but I just the way it's playing out is it it feels very obvious to me that that's what he's trying to do.

Charlie Lewis (30:34)

Anton makes an interesting point that it's possibly a bit of a win-win. Either he succeeds

Tina Quinn (30:37)

Hmm.

Charlie Lewis (30:38)

and he gets back in, or he becomes a a a go-to talking head who's constantly consulted on the on the great

Tina Quinn (30:43)

Absolutely.

Charlie Lewis (30:44)

the great lost the great lost kind of political talent of Australia. I think that would be in some ways a much easier role to occupy, you know, something similar. So that say, for example, Tony Abbott is a really good example of someone

Tina Quinn (30:54)

Hmm.

Charlie Lewis (30:54)

who in government had

Quite difficult time, shall we just perhaps put it briefly? and now but now can be kind of the the great sage on the mountaintop who can kind of dispense all this this useful information and can and have good jobs at think tanks and things like that.

the other big proposal emanating from from Angus Taylor recently was this extremely

strong cut back to immigration. That was obviously the big the big kind of proposal in the last week. it's not an act of great prescience to say this is to do with the surging popularity of one nation. And I think a an interesting subplot to all of this is the fact that Victoria goes to the polls at the end of November. And in a state where

one nation has done traditionally very, very badly. They are they are polling to do potentially extremely, extremely well. and the the the sitting Labour government

Is looking likely to be ousted. And so obviously there's a huge amount of stake for the right-wing alternatives here, whether it's the Liberal Party or One Nation. And I suppose I feel like there's gonna be a real spiraling kind of back and forth between those two jurisdictions over the next couple weeks, trying to test what works, what what steals a little bit of light away from one nation, the Liberal Party. Tina, you recently wrote a wonderful piece for Crikey of about

press galleries what you what what what one interview we called like the addiction to drops basically the addiction to to access and how this is playing out in particular with Pauline Hansen. I'd love to get your take on how you see that dynamic playing out with the Victorian state election as it kind of as it amps up.

Tina Quinn (32:25)

Well, I think we're we're witnessing a political debate in which one nation is increasingly setting the terms and the coalition is

responding by moving further towards its position. So I just feel like the coalition's constantly on the back foot. And

there's a real question about the role that the media plays in that process, obviously. in that recent piece for Craike, when I was examining the practice of political drops,

where you know politicians or their officers selectively provide stories to journalists, sometimes with conditions around how those stories are initially reported. What really came through to me is that the the danger in in a system that operates like that is that the the journalist becomes part then of the political communication strategy rather than an independent interrogator of it. And I think we need to look at that alongside the way that we cover parties like One Nation.

and not increasingly sort of

I guess indulge in horse race journalism. we we get really caught up in the horse race of it all and the politics of it all and who's ahead and who's behind. I think when a politician makes a provocative claim about migration, for instance, that claim instead of just dominating the news cycle, regardless of whether it's supported by evidence, needs to be properly interrogated.

What

I found really troubling about the migration debate is that we've spent an enormous amount of time discussing how many migrants we should cut rather than asking what those actu those cuts would actually mean for the economy or our aging population or how we would staff our hospitals or aged care or the construction workforce. And that's a huge failure of political journalism if we're just simply reporting the contest without interrogating its underlying assumptions. Now the media

Is not one big monolith. this isn't everyone within the media, this isn't all political journalists, but it is something that's increasingly becoming an issue. And I think it's a really uncomfortable discussion for political journalism because access is so central to how that profession operates. know, there's nothing inherently wrong with with journalists cultivating sources or receiving exclusives. That's part of the job, but there is a fundamental distinction between

being given information and agreeing to restrictions on how you can report it. And I think that's one of the most troubling aspects of drops. And I think, you know, there's so much to talk about, know, with what's being proposed for migration. I mean, we've just had the intergenerational report handed down. And it's projecting that deaths are going to exceed births within the next

40 years. That's really a warning. That's a huge economic warning for us. that hasn't really properly been interrogated. We're still sort of sticking to this. Well one nation advocating for us to cut all immigration so what are the major parties going to do? What's the coalition gonna do? How's Labour gonna respond? You know, how much are they gonna cut migration by? There's not a real interrogation of

Well, according to the Intergenerational Report, maybe the last thing that we should be doing is cutting immigration at all. It sounds like maybe we should increase it, but that's not a discussion that we're having at all.

I think the bigger question when it comes to drops and sort of access journalism is is what happens when the pursuit of that access really starts to compromise editorial independence. And I think if the price of getting the story first is agreeing not to include criticism or alternative perspectives, we need to ask who's really benefiting from that arrangement. And I think the the coming weeks

in Victoria are going to be very enlightening.

I think very instructional for, you know, the the federal election, which is still I mean, it's amazing that we're still talking like this. I mean, it's two years away, but I do think the result will end up sounding a number of warning alarms. I think it's gonna be very interesting.

Anton (36:14)

a good guideline, although always not always true obviously, is that I think journalism is the best when you report things that politicians don't want out there, or you know, those

Tina Quinn (36:26)

Mm.

Anton (36:26)

in power or whoever you're reporting about. and that's not always true. That's not always the best recipe for good journalism, but a lot of times it is, and I think a lot of this kind of

drop transit you're describing does not you know, pass that test. So yeah.

Tina Quinn (36:40)

Well, to quote the wonderful Amy Ramakis, who I spoke to for that piece, who writes for the point and is a contributing editor for The New Daily, our job is not to join the political class, it's to report on it. Otherwise we're just courtiers.

Charlie Lewis (36:58)

Well, there's nothing I'm gonna say that will round off a de this episode any better than that will. it will be fascinating to see how this plays out and indeed whether the press gallery starts showing a bit more solidarity to the colleagues that are being banned from One Nation events, but that's perhaps a subject for a future episode. I wanna thank our guests Tina and Anton for coming in. That's been fascinating. I really appreciate your time.

Anton (37:22)

Thank you.

Tina Quinn (37:22)

it's

been great to speak to you. Thanks, Charlie.

Charlie Lewis (37:24)

And please join us again next week.