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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
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National Security
SPEECH

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SPEECH

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Speaker	Pocock, Sen David	Question No.	

Senator DAVID POCOCK (Australian Capital Territory) (13:50): This is not my first speech. I was very pleased to hear the Attorney-General has stopped the prosecution of Bernard Collaery. The Attorney-General's action ended the unjust prosecution of a man who blew the whistle on the disgraceful attempt by the Australian government in 2004 to defraud the impoverished people of Timor-Leste of their oil and gas resources by spying on their sea boundary negotiating team. They were spying on what were supposed to be good-faith negotiations.

Regrettably, the end of the Collaery trial isn't the end of excessive and unjustified state secrecy in our courts and tribunals. Today, there's another secret proceeding happening in the Melbourne office of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The matter relates to a request to the National Archives for access to a 22-year-old cabinet submission relating to the Timor Gap negotiating strategy of the Howard government. The applicant, former senator for South Australia Rex Patrick, wants full disclosure of Mr Howard's and Mr Downer's dirty dealings. But this Labor government is happy to have a secrecy certificate applied to the proceedings. Mr Patrick is fighting against the government's refusal to release historical documents, but he's not allowed to see the documents and is being prevented from hearing the government's arguments. He has both hands tied behind his back.

The secrecy around the Howard government's attempts to steal Timor-Leste's oil and gas has to end. Australians want full disclosure. The Timorese want that too, and while secrecy continues there will be an elephant in the room when our officials meet with theirs. As His Excellency Xanana Guzman said in the AAT proceedings, 'Continued secrecy creates a sense of suspicion and impropriety, and cannot remain a feature of'—(*Time expired*)