



Nova Peris NT senate nomination divides opinions

Sales, Leigh.
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LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: The fallout is continuing in the Labor Party over the Prime Minister's "captain's pick" for a Senate spot in the Northern Territory.

Julia Gillard has announced that former athlete Nova Peris will take the ALP's number one Senate slot there, dumping the current Senator Trish Crossin in the process.

Some Labor identities are furious at the announcement, saying it overrides grassroots politics.

One of those is former Territory Labor MP Alison Anderson, who's now with the Country Liberal Party.

Earlier this week, she said that the Labor Party uses aborigines and that Nova Peris would be, "The maid to do the sheets and serve the cups of tea."

Alison Anderson joined me from Darwin.

Alison Anderson, you said this week that Nova Peris would be a "Maid to do the sheets and serve the cups of tea for the Labor Party." What do you mean by that?

ALISON ANDERSON, NT MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT: Look, I used it in a very, very different context to however it was portrayed. I was quoting my brother, Tracker Tilmouth, and his larrikinism in the way he described the Labor Party when he tried to contest and want the Senate seat in the Northern Territory as well.

LEIGH SALES: So what was the point you were trying to make?

ALISON ANDERSON: What I meant by that, Leigh, is that Aboriginal people have always just been allowed to go into the verandas of the Labor Party but today someone is allowed to go in and be the maid and the cup of tea maker.

LEIGH SALES: Nova Peris isn't exactly a wilting violet. Why do you think she'd go along with that?

ALISON ANDERSON: Oh look, I think that this is about the Labor Party and the pretence they've put up to Aboriginal people. They've always pretended to be friends of Aboriginal people but in actual fact they haven't.

And I think that Nova is, this is the first time that Nova will go into that house in the Labor Party and I think that she'll realise they're not true friends and I think that we have to be very, very careful in understanding the Labor Party. They've always used us for their own purposes and they've really not looked after Aboriginal people.

LEIGH SALES: But even if I take you at your word on that, isn't it better to have some sort of Aboriginal representation in the Parliament than not?

ALISON ANDERSON: Look, I think that you have to take my word on this because unlike people sitting in Sydney and Melbourne giving you advice on Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, we live and breathe the problems of Aboriginal disadvantage and we know the problems.

And I think it is very, very important that anybody sitting in any kind of parliament understands the poverty and the extent of the poverty and we all have to work towards making things better. But it doesn't mean that we work through a policy of separatism. We work through the policy of bringing everybody together and enhancing whatever state we live in and we're talking about the Northern Territory today.

LEIGH SALES: But Nova Peris will be in the Senate as an Aboriginal woman, as somebody with experience working in remote issues, working on health issues, particularly working on education issues. Isn't that something that would be in the interests of people there in the Northern Territory?

ALISON ANDERSON: Of course. And I think Leigh you didn't see the full interview of the ABC in the Northern Territory. I did congratulate her at the very beginning and I think that you have to be very, very careful in what context you're asking me this question because you might have only just seen some parts of the interview and not the full interview.

LEIGH SALES: I'm actually just going from what you're saying now, which is I'm just trying to be clear about whether or not you think having Nova Peris as the elected representative for the Senate for the Northern Territory is a good thing?

ALISON ANDERSON: I think it is about the Labor Party. This is not about Nova. This is about the Labor Party using Aboriginal people and I think that Warren Mundine has brought Julia Gillard's screaming to the centrepiece of recognising that Aboriginal people are important parts of the democracy of Australia and I think she has been shamed into this and she should be absolutely ashamed of herself that she's getting Aboriginal people from outside of her own party and she's taken away the power from the Northern Territory Labor Party.

LEIGH SALES: Do you regret using the words about serving the cups of tea and being a maid?

ALISON ANDERSON: Oh look, I don't withdraw that comment at all because that was not aimed at Nova. That was aimed at the Labor Party. The Labor Party have been false friends of Aboriginal people for many decades.

LEIGH SALES: But you can understand, can't you, how Nova Peris might feel a little offended by that and that it was aimed at her?

ALISON ANDERSON: I don't think she does. I think that it is the way that the word was manipulated by certain media outlets. I certainly made it quite clear that I'm quoting something that someone had said and, like I said, the whole interview, if you have a look at the whole interview, at the beginning I did congratulate Nova.

LEIGH SALES: But if you think Aboriginal people should be in Parliament I'm not sure why you're upset that Nova Peris is being pushed into the Parliament by the Prime Minister because surely by whatever means she gets in there you would be happy to have an Aboriginal representative in the Parliament?

ALISON ANDERSON: I think you misinterpreted what I said, Leigh. I was not upset at Nova. I was actually directing it to the Labor Party and I think that you need to make sure that you have a look at the file.

LEIGH SALES: Alison Anderson, thank you very much for making time to speak to us.

ALISON ANDERSON: Thank you.

Credit: Leigh Sales