

Darren Hessenberger

Regarding the proposed “Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation” Bill 2023, I wish to convey my **strong rejection** of that bill and its principle.

1. The bill suggests that the digital platform providers will create their own rules and systems on the information it hosts.
 - a. During the recent pandemic when businesses and organisations were required to develop their own covid safe plans, we ended up with the most ridiculous and inconsistent application of the government’s guidelines. We have proven as a society recently that this is a bad idea and resulted in massive divisions, discriminations and detriment to the economy.
 - b. Digital platforms have become alternative and valid sources of news to the public. This should not be censored by a government-provided filter.
 - c. The Australian government was able to place warnings on certain digital content to inform viewers of a link to true sources of information. Eg the note from the Aus government at the bottom of youtube videos that talked about vaccination. This should be the maximum allowable interference from government.
2. I believe society works best with a minimum level of rules to guide it. Otherwise we become an over-governed nanny state and freedoms become unnecessarily restricted.
3. People should decide which sources of news they will accept not big government or big business. Everyone is always required to filter and discern the validity of information being conveyed.
4. Putting the power of censorship into the hands of business and government is fraught with risks. Who decides what’s in and what’s out? How are they supervised to ensure they are not being influenced by other interests? Are these people elected into these roles?
5. I don’t believe it’s the government’s job to meddle with information censorship. Communist China shows the extremes that eventuate when the government becomes the arbitrator of truth. That is scary to me. Canada has also succumbed to legislation changes that result in information censorship around elections. This is a massive deviation from the society’s roots and free speech.
6. I recognise the entertainment industry has a “code of practice” that informs viewers of the nature of the content eg “PG”, “M” or “MA”, which is a helpful guide. You could rate digital platforms like this, but I don’t believe government or business should have the power to control content. If the proposed Bill was applied to the film and television industry, it would chop scenes, change words or ban movies! Digital platforms are also valid sources of news and information, and this Bill would potentially control the information that ordinary people could access. This is not ok with me.
7. A good example of this issue can be seen with Twitter/X in the USA. It has now been exposed that big business and big government has been underhandedly controlling content available to the public that supports their own agendas. I see the proposed Bill leading us down that same path.