The ghost written article the government wanted us to publish

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy says this article, secretly written by his department and offered to the IPA Review, is ‘a huge improvement on the rubbish they normally print’. We thought we’d print this abridged version and allow IPA members to decide!

Positive spin in search of a byline

LAUREN WILSON

LABOR’S hand-picked NBN Champions are being sent articles written by communications strategists from the Department of Broadband to publish under their own names, speaking the benefit of the fibre network.

The government suspended the Satellite Subsidy Scheme last October. It launched two independent reviews into the program after it was revealed inadequately trained contractors had dislodged asbestos in more than 20 government-owned houses.

A senior department official told the hearing last night the department had been advised by Ernst & Young that one case of asbestos disturbance had been confirmed, relating to drill holes in walls.

How The Australian covered the scandal on 12 October
THE GHOST WRITTEN ARTICLE THE GOVERNMENT WANTED US TO PUBLISH

Dear James,

I have just written an article about how the National Broadband Network currently being rolled out across Australia will in many ways be of particular interest to women.

It is meticulously researched and would be quite gratis – no fee of course.

Please let me now if you are interested. I’d be happy to send it to you for consideration.

Sincerely,

SPIN DOCTOR
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

Editor’s note: a public servant wrote this while being paid with your taxes!

The National Broadband Network (NBN) — among the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Australia — will play an increasingly important role in advancing gender equality. Australia’s National Broadband Network holds great potential to empower women towards better health, employment a more flexible work-life balance, greater communication, and many opportunities in education and business.

While the rollout of the NBN will benefit the lives of the entire nation regardless of gender, some aspects of enhanced, NBN-enabled broadband will be of particular interest to women.

WOMEN AND THE WORKFORCE

It is in the area of work-life balance and access to employment opportunities that the NBN can make a considerable difference.

Women constitute about 70 per cent of the part-time workforce. As of May 2011, there were 2,419,200 women working part-time in Australia. Enabled by the NBN, its high-speed connections and superior videoconferencing capabilities open up many opportunities for women to be freed from the time, cost and stress burden of the daily commute to and from their workplaces, and find employment commensurate with their skills and experience. In our large cities, for people living in outer suburbs, commuting can be as much as four hours a day.
Teleworking will also open up opportunities for women in regional Australia—as businesses go digital, their staff can increasingly work virtually from their home offices, wherever they live. Teleworking also makes employment more accessible for carers, many of whom are women, who may give up paid work because they cannot work flexibly enough to juggle paid work and caring. This is particularly important for many older women without adequate superannuation.

Whether they are caring for a dependent child or a family member with a long-term illness, the NBN will make it easier for carers to work hours around their day-to-day caring responsibilities, while meeting the needs of their employers.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The NBN, with its capacity and lightning speed, promises to transform higher education, vocational training and transition from study to work.

Online education makes learning more accessible to Australians, no matter where they live, work or study. This is especially important for those who find it difficult to attend classes because of their family responsibilities, work commitments, medical condition or location.

The rollout of high-speed broadband to schools, TAFEs and universities in Australia, and the capacity to link with students at home, will extend the reach, availability and quality of education services. Students will be able to interact easily with each other and there will be better access to a variety of teachers and presenters.

Women who have not yet developed online skills stand to gain much from Digital Hubs which are being established in 40 of the first communities that benefit from the NBN. These Hubs provide local communities with training in digital literacy skills. They also showcase the applications that will be enhanced by the NBN and how households can take advantage of these opportunities by connecting with it.

**SOCIAL INCLUSION—THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

The extraordinary speed and ubiquity of the NBN, and the superiority of interconnected communication it offers, enables women to more effectively organise and lobby for their rights and engage politically, socially and economically.

The NBN has the capacity to provide, for the first time, a faster and wider platform for women to communicate and engage with government and the community sectors: women will have better tools to organise collectively and make their voices heard.

And because the NBN as a national rollout will ultimately have the capacity to reach every home in Australia, a new world of opportunity will open up for women who are socially disadvantaged.

**WOMEN IN BUSINESS**

Women who have opened a small or medium-sized business or who have become part of a not-for-profit organisation can receive training and advice from another government initiative, the Digital Enterprise Program. It offers greater understanding of how to maximise the opportunities from greater digital engagement enabled by the NBN.

**WOMEN AND BROADBAND—AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

The United Nations Broadband Commission for Digital Development has highlighted the role of broadband in levelling the playing field for women, stating that:

'Technologies and broadband are key to achieving empowerment and gender equality. They provide an excellent means of opening up opportunities in education and employment, as well as access to information, and have the potential to neutralise much of the discrimination traditionally faced by women.'

Another UN body, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is concluding its three-year campaign this year (2012) to raise awareness worldwide of the role that information and communication technologies can play in empowering women.

The campaign includes major international advocacy events involving partnerships with governments, industry, and other UN agencies, to highlight the potential of technology to transform women's lives.

It has ranged over career choices and greater access to services such as e-health, e-education, e-commerce, e-banking and many applications and devices designed to address the day-to-day challenges faced by women all over the world.

Australia is providing $3.6m in support of the GSMA mWomen program, an initiative to unite women and mobile technology to advance gender equality and global development. Jointly funded through USAID’s Global Development Alliance by AusAID, USAID, Visa Inc. and the GSM Association, the program aims to halve the mobile phone gender gap by 2014.
Note to self:
Next time, Google “Institute of Public Affairs” before sending them an article for publication!

Conroy’s minions offer to ghost the good news

EXCLUSIVE

CHRISTIAN KERR

PUBLIC relations staff from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy are hawking articles praising the NBN to publications, telling editors they are free to run the stories under the names of their own journalists.

James Paterson, editor of the Institute of Public Affairs Review, which has been fiercely critical of the NBN, was startled to receive an offer of an article from an adviser at DBCDE on Friday offering a “meticulously researched” article on the NBN and women “pro bono”. A follow-up email said it “is not something the government is breaching every ethical and standard imaginable,” he said. “It is deeply hypocritical. The (Australian) Press Council general statement of principles say that publications should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers; so how can the minister justify his own department subverting journalistic standards in this way? How many other departments have been ghostwriting pro-government material for the media?”

Liberal MP Paul Fletcher, whose complaint to the APC over a NBN advertising supplement in The Sydney Morning Herald has lead the council to develop additional guidelines for such features, called the episode “extraordinary”.

“This appears to be part of a troubling pattern of media manipulation,” he said. “At the same time, Conroy is...