

Media Release



A-SPAN – A NEW PUBLIC AFFAIRS CHANNEL FOR AUSTRALIA FROM SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION

8 December 2008

Australia's subscription television leaders FOXTEL and AUSTAR today announced the launch of A-SPAN -- a new national, not-for-profit channel dedicated to public affairs to be made available to all Australians.

A-SPAN was unveiled today in Canberra by the Prime Minister the Hon Kevin Rudd MP.

Australian Subscription Public Affairs Network – A-SPAN – is the only service of its kind in Australia and a breakthrough innovation in independent public affairs provision to Australians.

A-SPAN is in part modelled on the US public affairs channel C-SPAN and will be an affiliate of C-SPAN. Created by the US subscription television industry, C-SPAN is recognised worldwide as a leader in independent public affairs journalism.

A-SPAN will however be uniquely Australian at its core, and majority Australian in its content. It will also – like C-SPAN - be independent of editorial intrusion. A-SPAN will always and only convey parliamentary, and other policy discussion directly to its audience in its original delivery without judgement or comment. Editorialising is appropriately left to the diverse arms of the existing Australian media.

In a critical breakthrough for Australia's international interest, A-SPAN's affiliation with C-SPAN will see A-SPAN programming broadcast in the US on C-SPAN. This will deliver for the first time Australian political and policy views direct to the US public, and to the US political leadership.

A-SPAN will also deliver to Australia parliamentary coverage from Britain's House of Commons, the New Zealand Parliament, and is developing links with the United Nations and the European Union as part of an evolving global outlook to complement the channel's core Australian viewpoints.

A key overarching role of A-SPAN will be to provide news and information on how government and public institutions operate, with a particular emphasis on Parliament, including educational content aimed at demystifying the workings of the political process.

A-SPAN is an initiative of the subscription television platforms FOXTEL and AUSTAR, and the Australian News Channel Pty Ltd, owner and operator of Sky News.

A-SPAN will be fully-funded by the subscription television platforms on a not-for-profit basis. There will be no cost to Australian taxpayers.

A-SPAN initially will be provided to all 2.2m FOXTEL and AUSTAR subscriber homes and their 7 million viewers in regional, rural and metropolitan Australia as part of their basic service at no additional charge. FOXTEL and AUSTAR will also make A-SPAN available to schools through the existing education packages they provide to schools nationally.

A-SPAN will also be available online and on a free-to-air basis, and has been offered to the terrestrial narrowcast service being trialled by Broadcast Australia in Sydney. Depending on future Government decisions on the use of the spare terrestrial spectrum on Channels A and B, A-SPAN would be made available nationally for terrestrial transmission on this spectrum at no charge to all Australians.

A-SPAN will commence on January 20 2009, with comprehensive coverage of that day's inauguration of US President-elect Barack Obama.

A-SPAN's credo is "Discussion, Debate, Democracy".

ANC Chairman, Mr John Hartigan said: "A-SPAN has been in development by ANC since we launched the Sky News Parliamentary Channel in 2004. ANC in 2006 first promoted its concept of a full public affairs channel to the then Federal Government and the Opposition. With the support of FOXTEL and AUSTAR, that concept has become A-SPAN. It will become a major platform to promote political knowledge, awareness and debate in our community".

FOXTEL Chief Executive Officer Mr Kim Williams said: "A-SPAN is another major contribution to media diversity and public interest broadcasting by FOXTEL. We are delighted to support this initiative which I believe will become a key feature of our democratic system in the years to come. A-SPAN encapsulates the leadership and innovation in media services for Australians that is a hallmark of subscription television."

AUSTAR Chief Executive Officer Mr John Porter said: "The launch of A-SPAN exemplifies AUSTAR's belief that regional and rural Australians should have access to the very best news, information and educational content on offer. By allowing Australians inside the world's decision-making rooms, A-SPAN will become a critical resource for families, schools, universities and anyone in regional Australia with an interest in the process of government."

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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ABOUT A-SPAN's PROVIDERS -

FOXTEL: is Australia's leading subscription television provider and is connected to more than 1.5 million homes on cable and satellite through retail and wholesale distribution. FOXTEL strives to ensure subscribers find TV they want to watch every time they switch on through delivery of more than 150 channels covering news, sport, general entertainment, movies, documentaries, music and children's programming. FOXTEL is owned by Telstra Corporation Ltd (50%), The News Corporation Ltd (25%), and Consolidated Media Holdings Limited (25%).

AUSTAR: AUSTAR (Australian Stock Exchange "AUN") is a leading provider of subscription television services in regional and rural Australia, with more than 700,000 customers enjoying principally satellite digital television services. Internet and mobile telephony services complete AUSTAR's product offering. AUSTAR is also a significant provider of programming in the Australian television market through its 50% owned joint venture, XYZnetworks. Liberty Global Inc., the largest international broadband cable operator in terms of subscribers, holds an indirect controlling stake in AUSTAR.

ANC: Sky News and Sky News Business Channel are services of Australian News Channel Pty Ltd, Australia's leading provider of 24-hour news services. SKY NEWS operates the most advanced digital news platform in Australia, and can deliver services to any digital medium – cable, satellite, mobile phones, mobile TV, broadband, as well as providing downloads to iPod or MP3 players. Sky News and the Business Channel are provided to all FOXTEL and AUSTAR subscribers. ANC is owned equally by British Sky Broadcasting, PBL Media, and Seven Media Group.

A-SPAN BACKGROUND:

A key overarching role of A-SPAN will be to provide news and information on how government and public institutions operate, with a particular emphasis on Parliament, including educational content aimed at demystifying the workings of the political process.

A-SPAN will be operated by ANC, utilising ANC's experience in operating Sky News and the Sky News Business Channel. Sky News has become a leader in comprehensive, independent political journalism that will be a foundation stone for A-SPAN. Sky News launched the Parliamentary Channel in 2004. Over the past decade, only one television broadcaster has reported every federal, state and territory election across all of Australia, and New Zealand elections – Sky News.

In a critical breakthrough for Australia's international interest, A-SPAN's affiliation with C-SPAN will see A-SPAN programming broadcast in the US on C-SPAN. This will deliver for the first time Australian political and policy views direct to the US public, and to the US political leadership.

A-SPAN is another major contribution to public interest broadcasting by subscription television, which created the national community television service, Aurora, and was first to broadcast the indigenous television service NITV.

Subscription television is the major platform for media diversity in Australia: 8 news channels led locally by Sky News and Sky News Business Channel, and 11 documentary channels.

Subscription television represents more than 60 different platform providers and channels servicing regional, rural and metropolitan Australia, owned by more than 40 different Australian and international media companies.

A-SPAN has been in development by ANC since it launched the Sky News Parliamentary Channel in 2004. ANC in 2006 first promoted its concept of a full public affairs channel to the then Federal Government and the Opposition. That concept has become A-SPAN.

Key Programming Features of A-SPAN:

- Comprehensive “live” coverage of the Federal Parliament – including sittings of the House of Representatives and the Senate; critical Senate Estimates hearings; complete coverage of Question Time in the House and the Senate.
- Coverage of Question Time in the NSW, Victorian and Queensland State Parliaments – expanding over time to all States and Territories.
- A-SPAN is initially developing a program series to focus on the key players in Australian democracy including interviews of prominent politicians and public policy newsmakers of the day.
- A-SPAN will provide a unique national platform for policy debate in the wider community. A-SPAN will be available to broadcast speeches and debate from prominent individuals and major public and private institutions, including education institutions, and organisations such as the National Press Club, the Lowy Institute, the Sydney Institute, the Melbourne Institute, the Australian National University and other universities and major business and public policy representative groups.
- A-SPAN will comprehensively cover public events of major national importance such as Anzac and Gallipoli services and Australia Day services.
- A-SPAN’s affiliation with C-SPAN will enable A-SPAN to provide “live” coverage of crucial discussion and debate from the US Senate and House of Representatives, plus coverage of other major public affairs news and policy thinking as it breaks in the US.
- A-SPAN, through an affiliation with BSkyB in the UK, will deliver parliamentary action from Britain’s House of Commons including Prime Minister’s Question Time.
- A-SPAN is developing links with the United Nations and the European Parliament - and A-SPAN will be devoted to coverage with a global outlook.
- A-SPAN will provide coverage of the New Zealand Parliament.

About A-SPAN's Affiliate – C-SPAN:

C-SPAN is a private, non-profit company, created in 1979 by the US subscription television industry as a public service. Its mission is to provide public access to the political process. C-SPAN receives no government funding; operations are funded by fees paid by cable and satellite affiliates who carry C-SPAN programming.

C-SPAN says its mission includes to provide access to the proceedings of the US House of Representatives and Senate, and to other forums where public policy is discussed, debated and decided--all without editing, commentary or analysis and with a balanced presentation of points of view; to provide elected and appointed officials and others who would influence public policy a direct conduit to the audience without filtering or otherwise distorting their points of view; to employ production values that accurately convey the business of government rather than distract from it.