

Malcolm Turnbull's speech imitating Donald Trump could fall flat



US President Donald Trump and Malcolm Turnbull during their meeting in New York last month. Picture: Nathan Edwards

Chris Kenny, The Australian, 7:22PM June 15, 2017

Malcolm Turnbull turned comic last night, and his enemies might have the last laugh. The Prime Minister's off-the-record performance as Donald Trump is likely to become a major talking point.

My golden rule for Liberal and National party politicians is that if they are pleasing the press gallery — especially Fairfax and ABC journalists — they will invariably be doing the wrong thing by their party and constituency.

It is a well-worn path — especially for moderate Liberals — to appeal to the sensibilities of the so-called progressive media: speak with alarmism on climate and feel the love; speak with compassion on border security and be swept up in their embrace; or mock conservatives and have them eating out of your hand.

The trouble is every time Coalition MPs do this they are falling for the siren song of the media/political class instead of remembering the mainstream voters they represent. This is the trap that Turnbull has fallen for — in a big way at a bad time.

At last night's Midwinter Ball, the Prime Minister gave his traditional off-the-record and lighthearted address to an elite gathering of journalists, businesspeople, media executives and political operatives. The way to handle these events is to use self-deprecation. Mock yourself and tease the media. It rarely fails and is safe ground.



Oakes reveals leaked PM speech

But Turnbull decided to mock Trump — he mimicked the President of one of our greatest trading partners and security ally. There were lines about fake news, a “Russian guy” and defying the reality of the polls, and it was delivered replete with hand gestures. Cheap laughs, to be sure, for a crowd largely made up of viscerally anti-Trump journalists.

Yet this was deeply unwise for a Prime Minister. No matter what Trump or his diplomats say publicly, it won’t have gone down well in the US. America does us a crucial favour on refugee resettlements and our PM mocks their President.

I wasn’t at the ball — that is why I am not bound by the confidential nature of the occasion — so I am not aware of all of the content. There clearly was an element of self-deprecation involved and most of the crowd enjoyed it.

But as soon as I heard about the Trump impersonation it struck me as a major story waiting to break. Channel Nine’s Laurie Oakes — also not at the ball — was leaked some footage of the event, recognised its significance and put it into the public domain.

At a troublesome time for the Prime Minister, just when he is trying to unite his party on climate policy, this will generate internal concerns about judgment. The Left will love the fallout even more than they loved the jokes.