

RON JOACHIM

Kai Swoboda,
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Via email kai.swoboda.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Kai,

Please accept this as a submission to the committee.

I write as a concerned citizen in relation to Members of parliament who resign during their term because they wish to pursue other interests.

This is particularly topical given the spate of recently re-elected Coalition members, who it seems, having lost the spoils of Ministerial office, are now resigning. It begs the question --would they be resigning if the Coalition had been re-elected at the last election? I very much doubt it. There is rarely an instance of a Minister resigning from the Parliament within 6-9 months of having been re-elected to pursue other interests.

Whilst this is currently a poor reflection on the Coalition, it has also been evident when Labor has lost office in the past.

I have no problem where a person is genuinely ill, has dramatic changes in family situations or is appointed to a position of public service e.g. diplomat, judge

Where the mere loss of office leading to a lesser job, less importance or lesser interest in the parliament results in a resignation to pursue other interests, I consider this to be totally inappropriate.

Candidates, whether they be Ministers or first time candidates going to an election are under an obligation to serve their time if elected. They go to the electors asking for votes and the electors are entitled to believe that whoever wins will serve the electorate as their member.

It is disgraceful that some members do not fulfil the responsibilities they asked for and were given, especially when taxpayers' money is used to fund campaigns.

I believe they and their party should be significantly financially penalized for causing unnecessary by-elections which cost the taxpayers unnecessary expenditure. There needs to be some deterrents.

I would like the Committee to develop a plan to discourage this type of appalling abrogation of responsibility and disregard for the public purse.

In response to a letter about this issue to the Prime Minister, Kate Harrison, the Chief of Staff to Senator the Hon John Faulkner advised me of the following:-

“while Senator Faulkner can understand your concerns, he feels that significant legal and practical difficulties could arise from preventing Parliamentarians from retiring early, as it would be very

difficult to determine and police genuine circumstances for resignation. Furthermore, a penalty regime could be seen as discouraging eligible persons from standing as Parliamentarians and therefore, this could decrease participation in democracy.”

It is of some concern and disappointment that the Senator considers the issue too difficult to solve. In my view with the legal resources of the Commonwealth I can not accept this proposition.

All the Leader of the Opposition had to offer in response to a similar letter to him about the matter was the following:-

“As a voter you are entitled to expect an absolute commitment from your elected representatives and I understand your frustrations when a politician does not serve their full term.” Like the Senator he put forward no solutions apart from advising that he has “no plans to provoke a by-election in Wentworth!”

I look forward to the Committee proposing some system to deter the practice of parliamentarians leaving office early after an election in which their party was not elected. I reiterate there needs to be some deterrents to both political parties as well as individuals for incurring unnecessary expenditure for the taxpayer.

I have no objection to this submission being placed in the public arena.

Yours sincerely,

Ron Joachim
7th October, 2008