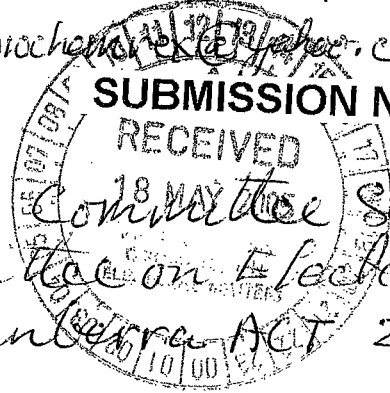


Keith Rex 5/38 Stephen Street Maddington WA  
NSW 2021 tel 02 93312372 knochendick@optusnet.com.au

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 149
Date Received 15-3-05
Secretary to the Committee



SUBMISSION NO. 149 5 pages + 1 item

Forbes Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Thank you for letter of 5 May 05 in reply to my inquiry about making a submission & including a brief indication of my intentions.

From your letter I have decided to make the full submission now and trust you will take steps for the Committee to examine it.

I am happy to abide by conditions you have set out for such submissions

Submission on Federal Electoral matters  
by Keith Rex 14th May 2005

I have many points to raise, some of a minor & some of a major nature, but I feel that such wide ranging proposals should be made in the context of a philosophy so their intent is clear.

First it is my belief that Democracy is our only salvation and that while our Governments claim our system of Government is a Democracy, that is very far from the truth. This is not the fault so much of the Government as of the people at large. While most will pay lip-service to Democracy - so recognising its virtue, due to the selfishness of human nature, virtues such

justice, fair play, equality, honesty, etc 2  
receive little more than lip-service and what people want and seek is selfish personal advantage.

This being so I propose that Democracy be enforced, promoted by Parliament, Education and that anti-Democracy be constantly denounced.

It is a farce to suggest that forcing us at gun point every few years to vote for people we do not know and have no way of knowing about who do not know us and who have no interest in our views.

Voting is the least essential need for Democracy. Would we seek to have our doctors elected by a popular vote so we could be subject to a loud mouth without a medical degree? But bad political leaders are a far greater risk to our health than bad doctors, yet medicine is far more democratic than politics! We can desert a bad doctor - complain and action will be taken. He will be deregistered and punished.

But a bad politician is invulnerable and if he gets his party's endorsement probably will return at the election years away.

So while I would like politicians appointed the same way as doctors and all other professionals, I do not expect to see it done soon, however I think

we should be moving in that direction. (3)

It is the custom in the USA to appoint high officers of Government, Ministers of State on the basis of ability and there are steps in State Govts in Aus. And most of the Government business is done by appointed officers anyhow.

In this direction I favour the proposals to extend terms to 4 years.

And I favour abolition of forced voting. I endorse the arguments published in the AEC website but include some not published. We have other compulsory drafts to do work such as Jury duty, military conscription, but they are paid. Conscripted voters are not paid, they are forced to cover expenses themselves.

Now the Gov may consider the placing of a mark on a piece of paper too trivial an effort to pay for it, this only demonstrates the contempt the Gov has for the process.

But professionals are paid a steep fee for signing a paper, which they might not even bother to read. If they are so negligent & many politicians are, then they are engaging in fraud and can be punished.

Aside from the cost of transport, the time to get there - perhaps taking leave from work it is a sizable imposition the Gov expects of us for free, but if we are to truly vote & not just be ticked off, we must spend many hard

Hours of work making the decision with (4)  
No help from the Gov! Instead the Gov  
spends fortunes to mislead us and  
to deny us the facts we need.

I would consider a fee for voting  
of \$100 as nominal. However if the  
Government were to drop the compulsion  
I would not call for a fee. Forced  
voting with no pay is slavery!

We are unique among civilized nations  
in having forced voting in which a voter  
strike is banned, voting unions banned.  
This is a shame for us & makes us a  
laughing stock of the world!

A step in this direction for the  
Federal Government would be to follow  
the States and abolish forced preferential  
voting. We do not prefer any  
candidates who are opposed to our  
favourite and in many cases the  
most unpopular candidate gets elected  
because people assume he has no  
chance and give him a grudging vote  
to deny a serious contender. Is it  
Democracy for a person with no or  
slight primary vote to be "elected".

I am not in favour of sudden  
disruptive radical change and favour  
gradual change. We are already moving  
in the direction I endorse. The fact that  
penalties for non voting and non  
registration have not kept pace with  
inflation have given us a virtual  
return to free voting. It is so easy

to get out of the trivial fine, millions do not bother to vote. But it would be better to abolish the fine entirely. (5)

However the Government brings its legitimacy into question by not being serious.

so I propose that if the Government refuses to abolish forced voting that it make penalties realistic.

That the earlier practice of sending the Police to every door demanding proof of registration be reinstated, that the original fines be up graded to meet inflation, which would make it in the order of \$1,000 and that excuses for failure be tried in court.

Laws that are not enforced make a mockery of Law so they should be either enforced or abolished. If it is now legal to be a practicing sexual pervert why is it not legal to be a conscientious objector to voting? Do we not have our values confused?

### On Details of the voting Process

There is a great deal wrong with the voting procedure. To start we are forced to fight our way through an intimidating gauntlet of political thugs to get in the door of the voting station - some who may know where you live!

at the East Fed election where the station I was forced to attend at 5 weeks

Paddington in St Georges Church Hall, ⑥  
a supporter of The Democrats attempted  
to bully me into voting for his candidate  
at an earlier election - same Hall,  
the officer dealing out the ballots -  
a member of the Labor Party, knowing me  
personally & my voting intentions  
refused to give me a ballot! I  
was forced to call the supervisor before  
she would hand it over. Intimidation  
has no place in Democracy. I know the  
Left does not agree, but then it has  
no use for democracy!

There is no identification made of  
the voter before he receives a ballot.

It is well known that a lot of dead  
people vote - particularly in marginal  
seats. Many people make no secret of  
their intention not to vote so a list of  
their names can be used by unscrup-  
ulous candidates to register many spurious  
votes.

On registering to vote a citizen should  
receive a photo ident - updated every 5  
years. If the Roating plan for an ID  
card were implemented this would not  
be needed, but until we are allowed  
to have an ID card we must have  
photo ident voting cards!

Many people mistakenly believe that  
we are not required by law to vote -  
merely to have our name ticked off and  
wangle boast of voting informed or  
toss the ballot in the floor etc. Large  
→

Posters should be on station walls ⑦  
advising of penalty for improper use  
of ballots — underlining that informal  
voting is a crime. If any boast of  
voting informal or incite others to do the  
same they should be prosecuted and if  
forced voting is repealed this should not  
be. A voter strike should be a right, but  
not to write obscene remarks on a ballot.

Secrecy: While we are told the ballot is  
secret there is no guarantee of it. The  
booths are open. They should have  
curtains like in the USA. Also there is  
no penalty for violating the secrecy.

The pencil and paper vote is archaic  
- 19th Cent. We should have computer  
voting as in the USA. This would give  
us a fast tamper proof result. There  
will always be corrupt people — like  
the woman I mentioned who will try to  
defraud the vote so the human element  
should be kept to the minimum.

Section advertising. This should be  
forbidden at least within a km of the  
voting station. I think it should be  
entirely forbidden. This gives unfair  
advantage to rich candidates.

How to vote cards should be forbidden.  
If a person does not know by then his  
intention he should not be voting at  
all.

What I suggest is that an unbiased

account of candidates be given on the ⑧ media and if requested candidates may post information. If we still have forced prefs they should be required to explain why they want us to give our 2nd pref etc to say the Nazi Party etc.

all candidates should be required by law to provide extensive information about their philosophy etc on request.

and if elected should be required to answer all letters in a proper way. I have never received a single reply from the Democrats on any question. The "bastards" are accorded Party status & tax payers money to respond but they just pocket it! Any MP who will not answer or give a reasonable answer should be fined and exposed as a fraud in a Government paid public advertisement.

### The Adversarial System

Most of our problems come from our adversarial culture - the notion that life is relentless endless war with winner take all - a culture of winners and losers. Our society is permeated with this destructive philosophy. But do we really need an "opposition". Do we need Parties?

If adversarial is so good, why is it not universal? For every doctor we must have anti-doctors to undo his



healing work? vandals to oppose the builders so our house is in a perpetual state of disfunction like Parliament?

In my Democratic utopia our Representatives would not be based on irrelevant geography but on our personal interests and needs. With modern technology there is no reason why we all should not have individual attention.

We might each have several Reps as we have various interests. Voting could be based on numbers in each category such as "over 60", "sports hater or lover", "book lover", "TV lover", special health needs and interests, Religion, and a great many categories. Parents with children may have many Reps, stamp collectors few and for rare interests one Rep to manage many. In this way everyone would get attention in proportion to their numbers - true Democracy and even the illiterate and apathetic could be represented - true equality.

But until this Utopia, steps should be taken to expand Democracy & reduce adversarialism. With the Internet there is no excuse - more public opinion surveys - invitations for submissions and teaching in schools the concept of RESPONSIBILITY. We are all part of this Nation and we all have a responsibility to contribute to the common good.

as with Health some of us prefer to let

the experts manage our affairs. Others (10) like myself prefer to have a well informed working relationship with my doctors. I am well versed in medicine so I can do that to my advantage.

However I am not an Economist and cannot judge if the Budget is good for the Nation or for me and even if I could there is little I could do about it, so I do not want to hear about the Budget, leadership struggles and all these boring issues of no interest to us that politicians insist on pounding us with.

I want instead attention to the many concerns I have about which I am well informed - which are neglected by Governments. I find all this "point scoring" and abusive language & stunts in Parliament offensive.

We could learn much from the American Political system. Their politicians are far more responsive to the voters since they cannot rely as do Australian politicians in leaving it to the Police to get the voters out!

We keep hearing references to Aus being a Police State, well that is what a Police State really is - like a 3rd world Dictatorship!

I agree with Michael Duffey - and many others. We have FAR too many levels of "Government" duplicating activities (I will not call them services) and fighting

among each other & thanks to forced (11)  
voting treating us with contempt.

Our total population is equivalent to one large city & modern communication makes distance irrelevant. On the net I have more daily communication with people on the other side of the world than locally! yet our Government seems to think it is still the 19th Cent!

We should have one Federal Government (no opposition) and no Senate. All other functions should be dealt with <sup>by</sup> responsive responsible appointed qualified officials.

I really have no idea what these people we are forced to vote for actually do? They will not tell me. There is no information about it.

Ministers are transferred round at the drop of a hat, so clearly they are no more than figureheads? Do we need them? Could I get an answer?

Personally I do not have any pressing needs, but I have great ability and all my life I have resented the fact that it is such a struggle for me to apply my ability to make the world a better place. I have not sought riches but it is insulting to see riches showered on so many people who are nothing more than criminals. A few get caught but most live like lords! It distresses me to look

about and see so many things so (12)  
wrong about this country - which  
I could fix. There is no encouragement  
to people with talent. We are indeed  
the discriminated against class. But  
~~be~~ an arrogant sexual pervert spread-  
ing disease, or a terrorist or an  
ordinary criminal and you are  
treated as a hero! Given every  
privilege and facility to do mischief!

I am an experienced medical  
scientist but politicians very rarely  
have any scientific/engineering knowledge  
at all and have no means of under-  
standing how modern technical  
knowledge could so vastly improve  
the state of the Nation. They do not  
have the background to be able to  
understand the technology and fall  
prey to the unscrupulous and adopt  
policies that are most harmful to the  
Nation. If they are not just cynically  
corrupt, their heads are full of absurd  
19th Century ideology.

We all live in needless poverty and  
ill health because of this absurd  
adversarial system!

The above is an impressionistic account  
of the reforms I wish. I will be happy to  
provide more detail and I welcome such  
interest. In all my career I have suggested  
improvements but have had to counter the  
attitude "But we have always done it that  
way" - fear of change, failure to grasp  
→

that there are many other ways and that (13)  
our present way is not necessarily the best.

I hope that come July there will be an appreciation that the 19th Cent. was not the high point of civilization and we can do better.

### Summary of main points.

- 1 That voting be free - not forced
- 2 That at least forced preferential voting be abolished
- 3 That if voters are still to be conscripted without exemption they be paid.
- 4 That if voting remains forced that the original fines be updated in accord with inflation.
- 5 That how-to vote cards be banned.
- 6 That public advertising and political demonstrations be banned on election day.
- 7 That photo ID be required for all voters.
- 8 That privacy (secrecy) of voting be protected
- 9 That all candidates be required to make their details public and answer voters

# questions

- 10/ That all elected members be required to answer all letters properly.
- 11/ That the adversarial system, Party system - Opposition be abolished.
- 12/ That alternative systems of representation be considered.
- 13/ That better instruction about Democracy be provided in schools, etc.
- 14/ That The State, local government, and upper houses be abolished and only one Federal Government retained.
- 15/ That Ministers be appointed on merit like other professionals.
- 16/ That the term be extended to 4 years and the Senate be put in line with the lower house - all elections dual.
- 17/ That continuous Government/voter interaction be substituted for wild election campaigns.
- 18/ That full use be made of modern technology to advance Democracy
- 19/ That the AEC be forced to provide an interactive web site

and a monitored forum for voters and be required to answer all questions relevant to voting.

This submission I see as part of an ongoing process so I have not been exhaustive in detail and I expect to develop more ideas as the Nation comes to terms with the 21st Cent. I note there is an upsurge in radical creative thinking and a fading away of ideologies and an increasing number of public people in sympathy with serious reform, this I think bodes well for the future and I have much confidence that the Government will use its majority in the Senate to introduce many long overdue reforms

yours sincerely

Keith Rex

# Politics is always darkest before the yawn

Michael Duffy is Right!

**T**HIS week on *The 7.30 Report* we saw one of those magic media moments. It was Monday and Kerry O'Brien was interviewing John Howard. They began with a very serious subject, the kidnapping of Douglas Wood in Iraq. The Prime Minister looked serious and said: "It's a very distressing situation, and I just want to say to his family the nation is feeling for you."

O'Brien's next words were, "Now, Mr Howard, leadership", and both men broke into grins. I grinned myself. I guess this response mainly reflected relief at moving from the anarchic brutality of Iraq back onto the safe and scripted territory of local politics. Speaking for myself, there was also a rueful reflection on the triviality of the latter compared with the former. This was strengthened by the tedium and fakery in the local politics being referred to, the Howard-Costello leadership stoush.

This does not really exist. It is largely a media fabrication, with some half-hearted input from the politicians involved. John Howard is too successful and secure and Peter Costello too unaggressive and unsupported for this to be a story at all without copious amounts of journalistic Viagra.

There are certain dramatic story-lines journalists and editors are always trying to impose on reality. In this case it's the classic leadership challenge, inspired by memories of the Hawke-Keating conflict of more than a decade ago. But at least that story had strong roots in reality.

I recall around 1990 interviewing Labor ministers such as Kim Beazley and John Dawkins about the succession. They not only said Paul Keating deserved it, they could point to his influence across various areas of government, to his grasp of "the big picture". There was general agree-



Photo: Bruce Postle

ment that he had been essential to the government's nature and success, that he possessed qualities Bob Hawke lacked, and vice versa.

Costello's situation is entirely different. He has been a competent Treasurer but his influence on the Government, in the sense of making it different to what it would have been in his absence, is small. The most significant financial reform of the past decade, the GST, is associated with Howard, not Costello. People often talked of the Hawke-Keating government. No one, apart from a few polite Liberals, talks of the Howard-Costello Government.

And where Keating wanted the top job passionately and increasingly publicly, and had a respectable number of supporters, Costello doesn't. His discontent has been muted and when rebuffed he doesn't rage, he sulks. The media like to talk of the "Costello camp" but it's more like a small and lonely tent. The leading camper used to be Christopher Pyne, who received a (deserved) promotion last year from

John Howard. Pyne was almost embarrassingly reticent when brought onto Richard Glover's program on ABC Sydney radio this week to discuss Costello's future.

The absurd inflation of the Howard-Costello story is a reminder of how Australia gives too much attention to politics. We tend to accept too readily the political class's idea of its own importance. The truth is that Australia is blessed by boring and often irrelevant politics: life for most of us would be almost no different if Labor had won the last federal election, or if the Coalition had triumphed in NSW. To pretend otherwise - as politicians and the media that report on them implicitly do all the time - is a conspiracy against the public.

(Yes, I know I've been involved in this myself as a journalist. No correspondence will be entered into.)

It has an internal logic. The media machine set up to cover political high points, such as elections, is expensive and staffed by intelligent and ener-

getic people. It cannot simply be turned off when nothing of importance is happening. So it creates or inflates stories to fill the airwaves and the newspaper columns. Politicians go along with this: the last thing they want is for the media space devoted to themselves to shrink.

Australia suffers more than other countries from this problem. Not only are we a small and quiet place (despite having three levels of government engaged in determined efforts to expand their reach), we have compulsory voting in state and federal elections. This means politicians don't have to face the most obvious indicator of loss of relevance: low voter turnout at election time. The boon this provides for the political class can't be underestimated. When only 59 per cent of British voters attended polling booths in the 2001 election, British politicians and journalists went into a frenzy of self-reflection and agonising over whether politics was still relevant. In other countries, declining turnout has had a similar, if less sudden, effect. But in Australia, politics is the last of the great protected industries - in denying us the ability to refuse to vote, it protects itself from the knowledge of what the public really thinks of it. We live in an age in which everything is up for deregulation except the deregulators themselves.

The public has a right to demand either less coverage of politics or better political stories. Mark Latham did well for a while, but in the end he burst the narrative boundaries.

Now our political story-lines are stale and the main characters have been around for an awfully long time. The latest media effort to stimulate the Howard-Costello plot line reminds you of those desperate attempts to get a bit more drama out of the relationships between some of the old hands in *The Bill*. The audience is growing restless.

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