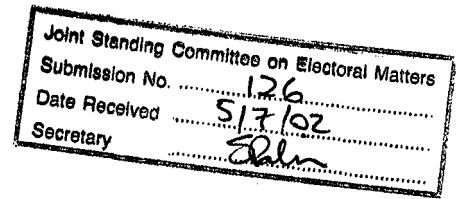


Read, Shane (REPS)

From: geoff [geoff@iform.com.au]
Sent: Friday, 5 July 2002 9:23 PM
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au
Subject: Submission Re 2001 Federal Election

The Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra



Dear Sir,

I am writing to you regarding the 2001 Federal Election in which I was employed as an officer in charge of a polling booth.

Since 1993, I have worked in various positions in Local, State & Commonwealth Elections ranging from polling officer, 2IC and OIC of a polling booth, liaison officer, Returning Office Assistant, Roll Review Officer and as an International Observer during East Timor's elections in 2001.

Reading the other submissions about being dis-enfranchised is quite interesting when the vast majority of Australian's don't actually realise how much effort is made so that they can actually exercise this right. I have dealt with people who are fed up with the system and wish to vote informally or just get their name marked off the electoral roll to avoid being fined and attempt to throw their ballot papers in the bin. People from non-English descent who know its their duty to vote but cant decide who to vote for.

I can remember when you could only vote in your sub division and having to visit several polling places to find the correct polling place (before I could actually vote). Having witnessed an election in East Timor where there was no postal voting, no pre-poll and or absent voting facilities. The only mobile voting was for the jail and that was based on being registered.

The majority of submissions that I viewed were from people who were unable to vote having been overseas and lodged their submissions via email. If they had viewed the AEC's website they would have been able to view the relevant information about overseas voting and going overseas. From memory, this information has been published for several years. Although I cannot recall that when I have left Australia I saw these brochures at the airport, I do know that they are available at the Post Office. Perhaps this is something that could be investigated along with them being available at all Passport Offices.

During the last election, my 2IC was referring to me people who could not remember where they were enrolled for. Rather than let her use my mobile phone to contact the Divisional Office, I rang and spoke to office staff and had their enrollment address clarified. This was something that I normally did not do in previous elections. Although electors had the opportunity to clarify their enrollment details prior to election day, there are voters who on election day having been refused an ordinary ballot only then find out that they are not on the roll for the address they claim. In most cases these people then remember their previous address and claim an absentee ballot.

I am uncertain as to how many absentee ballots are informal because the voter is not enrolled at the address claimed, but based on my local government experience it would be considerable. Not only are many voters disenfranchised as a result of their actions but the cost in processing these ballots would be considerable - correspondence being sent out explaining the ruling as well as getting the voter to re-enroll. Perhaps a special hotline on election day only could be established for polling officials only to ring and clarify a voters correct enrollment details. The other alternative would be to supply a laptop for each polling booth with a simple database containing electors details. The cost would be high but could be reduced but not having paying to hiring fees to the schools and several weeks after the election, the laptops are distributed to the schools. Alternatively the laptops could be leased for the occasion and then on sold.

I was fortunate during the 1999 Referendum, being able to obtain an AEC shirt and wore it on polling day. I found it beneficial that my staff could easily direct the public to me and that the public saw me as an electoral official rather than someone walking around. With more parties and party workers wearing campaign clothing it would be beneficial if all polling staff were issued with an official T shirt for polling day. Although this is an additional cost for polling day, the benefits exceed the cost in that all staff are clearly identifiable when compared to party workers and that the perception to the general public is immense. All electoral staff in East Timor were wearing an official shirt.

Although I have discussed this with a then serving member of parliament, I would like to suggest that working on

Polling Day for the AEC be made tax free similar to Defence Force Reservists. The money might seem good but when you actually calculate the hours worked and the time involved it does not equal a great sum. By making it tax free you will attract a big pool of potential staff for the AEC. One election I recruited my own staff from my local bank and it was of assistance in that I had staff who could count quickly and deal with people especially those with great customer service skills. Employing the right staff would enable quicker and more accurate results to be submitted as well as reducing the amount of work post polling.

I would also like to suggest that some form of staff recognition awards be made. I had one staff member who worked tirelessly and with dedication in customer service to the extent of even lending her reading glasses to a voter. This staff member decided to not continue working in any future elections for several reasons which also included money.

Some people are aware of what goes on during an election and when I ask some people if they would like to work they don't understand the impartiality. During a five minute interview I was once asked if I had political ambitions. Perhaps under the National Training Scheme could an assessment scheme be introduced so that my electoral skills be recognised. As a public servant, my skills are partially recognised but cannot be fully recognised because no formal scheme exists. Recognition of these skills would also assist in recruiting staff and gaining more than financial rewards.

When I manage to talk to other OIC's we complain about the lack of training amongst our staff, despite the best efforts of the Divisional Staff. In association with the creation of Recognition of Electoral Skills, could some computer based training be introduced. Most people have access to computers and this would also allow staff to get training in the areas that they are lacking.

Interactive testing similar to that used by the Roads & Traffic Authority and the computer industry could be used. People tend to learn more this way than from a workbook and the major benefit would be in that staff could concentrate on areas that their skills are lacking.

I trust that you find this submission interesting and I look forward to expanding upon the points that I have mentioned, in-addition to others that have been raised by other interested parties as I have information on them as well eg Senate Preferences being displayed.

Yours faithfully

Geoffrey Field

10 Captain Pipers Road

Vaucluse NSW 2030

02 9337 2917