

**SUBMISSION
TO
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS
INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

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PREFACE

Attached is a brief résumé of my credentials in political and civic education. This includes a summary of my current roles with the Parliament of Western Australia, the Western Australian Constitutional Centre, the Western Australian Curriculum Council and the Western Australian Electoral Commission. Over the past 25 years I have made many submissions to parliamentary committees, constitutional reviews and educational inquiries advocating political and civic education. Moreover, I have published extensively on civic education. On the basis of this extensive experience as a teacher, lecturer, consultant, examiner, researcher and author I have tabled a number of recommendations or considerations for the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to consider.

INTRODUCTION

Firstly, it should be recognised that particularly during the past two decades considerable progress has been made in the political and civic education domain mainly through the focus of citizenship education. In 1989 the Australian Education Council agreed upon a goal ‘to develop knowledge, skills, and values which enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context’. In the same year a Senate landmark report recommended a series of political and civic measures aimed at overcoming a ‘crisis which Australians cannot afford to ignore’. A Report entitled *Whereas the People* (1994) produced by the Prime Minister’s Civics Group generated the allocation of resources to address the apparent deficiencies in knowledge and civic confidence which the Group had identified as a ‘civic deficit’. The subsequent *Discovering Democracy* program was a significant contribution to civic education. It is not appropriate in this submission to document chapter and verse the developments which have emanated from a host of reports from parliaments and other agencies except to observe that political and civic education is a responsibility which is shouldered by many institutions. As the Western Australian Royal Commission into Commercial Activities and Other Matters (1992) stated:

No single agency or measure alone can ensure a society sufficiently informed about its civic institutions. It is in the character of a democratic community that many should be expected to contribute to this task. These are roles for our schools, universities and professional and public interest groups, to say nothing of a critical responsibility of the media. Yet the Parliament also should have an important part to play in this educative process. It can do much to ensure the availability of basic information about our institutions of representative and responsible government. It can equip its members to fulfil their representative role.

The Royal Commission recognised that one of the modern roles of parliament is to provide an educational service to the public, especially schools. It is surprising, though, that the Royal Commissioner did not explicitly refer to the Australian and Western Australian Electoral Commissions which have legislative educational obligations. Of course in Western Australia the 1992 Royal Commission report pre-dated the 1997 foundation of the Western Australian Constitutional Centre. In Western Australia a Civics and Citizenship Education Group meets quarterly to monitor the delivery of civic education in the State. All the main agencies in political, electoral, judicial and civic

education are represented on the Committee. This group has no statutory basis but its work helps to ensure that political (and constitutional), electoral, judicial and civic education is broadly aimed and effective. One product of the co-operation is the conduct of a Joint Outreach Program whereby the Western Australian Parliament, the Western Australian Constitutional Centre and the Western Australian Electoral Commission train part-time instructors to deliver an expertly devised parliamentary, constitutional and electoral package to schools in all regions of the State.

My readings and research suggest there exists a very strong belief in the community about the importance and need for political and civic education. Moreover, the interest levels in politics are quite high for large sections of the community although recent literature suggests the emergence of a concerning ‘disengagement’ in some quarters from the political process. At the same time public testing of political (including electoral) and civic knowledge invariably produces poor results. This lack of knowledge sometimes undermines the confidence of citizens to effectively engage in politics, including the mere reading and listening about its operation. Significantly, though, the tests are often poorly constructed and examine facts of which only the most informed parliamentarians, political scientists or educators could ever expect to answer correctly.

RECOMMENDATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

- As the education office at the respective parliaments in Australia have an important role it is imperative that highly graded professional educators should head each office. This officer or manager should be acquainted with the curriculum requirements of their State or Territory and should have links to all the civic education agencies. The objective that each citizen visit the Parliament (Commonwealth and State) should be pursued. If this is not possible, mainly due to distance and cost, ‘virtual’ tours should be available. Recent information that the Commonwealth Parliament has lost control of funding to subsidise student visits to the Parliament is very disturbing. Quality resources focused on the workings of parliament, and their electoral systems, should continue to be produced. It is desirable that each parliament author a citizens’ guide to its workings. The pattern in recent years of State Parliament’s conducting ‘People’s Days’ and regional parliament has magnified the importance of the parliamentary education office.
- The Australian and State/Territory Electoral Commissions should maintain their important educational role. Once again they should have expertise in their educational offices. All students (and public), either by visit to electoral education centres, or as part of their syllabus, should have knowledge and experience of the voting systems for the Commonwealth, State/Territory Parliaments. This simulation type exercise should ideally be experienced by all citizens. Again a ‘virtual tour’ of a visit to a voting booth should be produced by the respective. Australian, State and Territory Electoral offices.
- An agreement should ideally be constituted between electoral commissions to produce a video or DVD on electoral system mechanics. Clearly the preference (or alternative) vote should be explained. As plurality is used in some local

government jurisdictions it should be include. Importantly, too, the principles and main workings of the proportional representation (PR) voting formula should be widely available, including the internet. Unfortunately, PR is usually left off the educational agenda as it is placed in the 'too hard' basket.

- There is a dearth of research on the 'understandings' of the workings of the preference vote and PR voting systems. Research in this area should be undertaken to provide guidelines to the production of educational materials on the voting systems as well as assisting the effective advertising of Commonwealth and State elections.
- Legislative steps and promotions have been undertaken to improve voter registration, particularly of youth. More steps should be taken in this regard. A scheme that automatically informs all 18 year olds of their registration obligations and voting rights should be considered.
- Consideration should be given to extending voting rights to 16 year olds. This is not a new proposal. It is noted, however, that the recently published *Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy* (<http://www.powerinquiry.org/>) has advocated extending the franchise to 16 year old citizens. In Australia both 16 and 17 year old students could be encouraged to voluntarily enroll and vote.
- Again, in support of the *Power Report*, I would strongly support the concept of a voluntary Civics (Citizenship) Certificate. This Certificate would be available to all, but particularly youth, who could satisfy an examination which includes the rudiments of government, the operation of the voting system and the judicial structure. This course would be in the context of Australian values and include avenues for 'reflective' engagement. This Civics course outline should be brief. It would be necessary to appoint a well qualified advisory committee to undertake the task. A recent speech on 27 April 2006, by Andrew Robb, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, indicated that Citizenship Tests are on the Federal Government's agenda.
- The concept of a Civics Certificate should also be considered at the State level. This should be administered by the most appropriate civic education agency in each State. In its initial stages it could be a website activity but it could also be more formalized. The rudiments of the constitution, parliament, the electoral system, government and the judicial system should be incorporated in the context of broadly agreed Australian democratic values. In my judgment the Certificate should be open to all citizens, but focus upon students before they are required to enroll for federal, state and local government elections.
- The availability of a Civics (Citizenship) Diploma should not preclude broader citizenship courses in the State and Territories. Importantly, Parliaments and Electoral Commissions should be mindful of the State and Territory Curriculum Frameworks which encompass all years of schooling. Their respective educational programs should be linked and integrated to these curriculum frameworks in primary and secondary education.
- The Joint Outreach Program operated by funding and staff expertise from the Western Australian Parliament, the Western Australian Constitutional Centre and Western Australian Electoral Commission should be retained and operated, where viable in other States. Under this model instructors are hired to educate students

- from participating schools in all regions of the State about the rudiments of our parliamentary, constitutional and electoral system.
- Each State (and Territory) Constitution should be consolidated constitution and have an attached educational statement. In this vein a Preamble should be prepared for each State and Territory Constitution, as well as the Commonwealth Constitution. The Preambles, with elements similar to those agreed to at the 1999 Constitutional Convention, would enhance education about Australia's constitutions and values. A preamble could constitute an understandable and powerful educational link between citizens and their constitution. They would also be a basis for part of the Civics (or Citizenship) Certificate. The nation's constitutional documents are far too remote from the electorate.
 - The National Testing Program for Civics should not be accompanied by more information about what is being tested. As such tests usually focus on knowledge they are destined to achieve poor results. The 2005 round of national tests were undertaken without pre-tests in Western Australia. The benefits from national testing would be enhanced if the acquisition of certain knowledge, skills and attitudes could be specified or mandated from of civics and citizenship curriculums in the various States and Territories.
 - The formulation and presentation of civic education programs (including the electoral education components) need to be sensitive to the special needs of indigenous and immigrant communities. This is a challenging domain for which I lack the expertise to offer constructive advice.

Conclusion

I would be pleased to provide more information if it is sought by the committee.

Signed:

Harry C. J. Phillips
30 May 2006.

PRESENT ROLES IN POLITICAL, ELECTORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA (HARRY PHILLIPS)

Parliament of Western Australia

Appointed Parliamentary Fellow (Education) 2002

- Author of past and current parliamentary publications:
 - A Citizen's Guide to the Western Australian Parliament* (2006)
 - Revision for internet of *Second Reading: Parliamentary Government in Western Australia* (first published 1991).
 - Revision of a set 40 worksheets including Preference Voting and Proportional Representation.
 - Co-authorship with Phillip Pendal and Professor David Black *Parliament: The Portrait of the People*. Accompanied by planned surveys (already authorized).
- Acting Clerk of Regional Student Parliament (Geraldton, 1 June 2006).

Curriculum Council of Western Australia

- Current Chief Examiner of Political and Legal Studies (Tertiary Entrance Examination). Member of examination panel since 1983, chief examiner for 15 years.
- Member Political (and Legal Studies) Syllabus Committee since 1978.
- Member Politics and Law Consultative Reference Committee 2004-2005 (re Outcomes Courses of Study)
- Life member of the Political and Legal Educators Association

Constitutional Centre of Western Australia

- Member Advisory Board
- Schools convention sub-committee
- Author of research article on proportional representation voting system in Western Australia.

Western Australian Electoral Commission

- Discussions on 'non-voter' research having previously written a monograph for the Commission on 'Compulsory Voting'.

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

Ph.D.(Political Science): University of Western Ontario, London, Canada (1976)
Thesis title 'Challenges to the Voting System in Canada 1874-1974' (1974)

MA (Political Science): University of Western Ontario, London, Canada.
Thesis title 'The Compulsory Voting Experiment'.

BA (Politics):University of Western Australia (1972)

BA (History and Sociology): Curtin University of Technology (1973)

Teachers Certificate: Graylands Teachers College (1962)

Teachers Higher Certificate: Western Australian Education Department

Member of the Australian College of Education (MACE)

Member of the Western Australian College of Teaching

SELECTED SUBMISSIONS

- 1983: 'Political Literacy' to the Committee of Enquiry into Education in Western Australia (Beazley Committee, Perth) June.
- 1988: 'Political Education Needs in Australia' to the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Enquiry into 'Active Citizenship' (May 6).
- 1990: 'Parliamentary and Electoral Education Office in Western Australia', Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Active Citizenship Revisited, (December 15)
- 1990: Oral Evidence to the Western Australian Parliament Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Reform. Proposal for Schedule or Preamble to the Constitution. Transcript evidence (August 7)
- 1991: 'Political Efficacy for Youth' to the Select Committee on Youth Affairs, Legislative Assembly, Western Australia, (May 3).
- 1994 'Citizenship Indicators' to Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Committee (March 20).
- 1994: 'Constitutional Centre and Civic Education Proposals' to Western Australian Constitutional Committee (July 25).
- 1995: 'The Need for Political and Civic Literacy' to the Western Australian Commission on Government (March 24).
- 1996: 'The Case for a Consolidated Western Australian Constitution', Commission on Government (May 2).

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Phillips, Harry and Rielly Campbell (1982), *Key Concepts in Politics*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson.

Phillips, H (1980), 'The Political Participation Ethic and the Compulsory Vote', *Social Sciences Forum* 6 (1), 1-14.

Phillips, H (1991), *Second Reading: Parliamentary Government in Western Australia*, revised edition, Perth Ministry for Education.

Phillips, H. (1992), Co-ordinating Editor, *AXIS: Citizenship Education*, Issue 3, September.

Phillips, H. (1997), 'Focus on Citizenship: A Contemporary Australian Conundrum', *Journal of the Australian Studies*, 4, 1, April, pp. 3-10.

Phillips, H. with Black, D., Bott, B. and Fischer, T. (1998), *Representing the People: Parliamentary Government in Western Australia*, Fremantle: Arts Centre Press.

Phillips, H. (1999), 'Citizenship: An Historical Perspective', *The Social Educator*, Vol. 17, No. 1, April, pp. 41-49.

Phillips, Harry (2000), 'Women in the Western Australian Parliament 1921-1999: Towards a new Parliamentary Politics', *International Review of Women and Leadership*, Vol. 6, No. 1, July, pp. 24-37.

Phillips, H. (2006), *A Citizen's Guide to the Western Australian Parliament*, Perth: State Law Publisher

