



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

**Reference: Civics and electoral education**

FRIDAY, 28 JULY 2006

ALICE SPRINGS

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT



## **INTERNET**

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to:  
**<http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>**

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTORAL MATTERS**

**Friday, 28 July 2006**

**Members:** Mr Lindsay (*Chair*), Mr Danby (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Brandis, Carr, Hogg, Mason and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Griffin and Mrs Mirabella

**Members in attendance:** Senator Hogg and Mr Griffin and Mr Lindsay

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

The adequacy of electoral education focusing on but not limited to:

- the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;
- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;
- the school age at which electoral education should begin;
- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;
- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;
- the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;
- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;
- the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;
- the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and
- opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

**WITNESSES**

**CHANNING, Ms Anne, Lecturer, Centralian Senior Secondary College ..... 1**  
**FABIJAN, Mr Eddie, Assistant Principal, Centralian Senior Secondary College..... 1**  
**SHARP, Mr Ian, Lecturer, Centralian Senior Secondary College..... 1**



**Committee met at 10.50 am****CHANNING, Ms Anne, Lecturer, Centralian Senior Secondary College****FABIJAN, Mr Eddie, Assistant Principal, Centralian Senior Secondary College****SHARP, Mr Ian, Lecturer, Centralian Senior Secondary College**

**CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)**—This is a public inquiry. What you say will be recorded and will be available to the committee and publicly. We are interested in a range of things. We went to Warburton yesterday and met with Indigenous students there. How many Indigenous students are there in your school population?

**Mr Sharp**—At this school there are about 40 or 50 Indigenous students, which would represent about 20 per cent of the total student population.

**CHAIR**—At this school who is responsible for electoral and civics education?

**Mr Sharp**—I guess it would be me, because I am the legal studies teacher. The history teacher might do some parts of it. At the moment this is a senior secondary college, with only years 11 and 12, so the students do specific subjects. There is no social education program or SOSE, as it is called in the Northern Territory. Next year we will have year 10s here who will do the normal curriculum, which will include everyone doing social education subjects. We are working with the feeder schools, which do the year 10 course at the moment, and I will be inputting civics education into that course.

**CHAIR**—When we talk with students shortly, what kind of awareness do you think we will find they have of electoral matters—about their need to enrol and their responsibilities in that regard? Do you think we will find they have a significant awareness or not?

**Mr Sharp**—You will be seeing a legal studies class, so it will be a skewed sample. There are some kids in that class who are very interested in politics. Emilio did the class and he was very interested in politics. It will vary a lot. Some new kids have just come in who have never done legal studies before. On the stuff we have done so far, just listening to their questions and comments, they know nothing. I would imagine that would be reasonably representative of the student body. Some of them do not take any interest in government and stuff like that, some of them do take an interest and some of them are highly political. Those who do take an interest and who are highly political are looking forward, like Emilio was, to the chance to vote. They would celebrate it—‘This is the first election I have voted in.’

**Senator HOGG**—Unless they did it in your legal studies class, the vast majority of the students would be untouched by any electoral or civics education.

**Mr Sharp**—I could not say that because I do not know what they have done in the feeder schools. We have kids here from OLSH—which I think you are visiting today—St Philips, Anzac Hill and ASHS, so there is a wide range. A lot of it depends on which teacher they had in grade 9 social studies or in grade 10 and whether that teacher chose to do something on that.

**Senator HOGG**—So there is no coordination between your school and the feeder schools so that you have some idea of the level of understanding or knowledge in this area.

**Mr Fabijan**—Basically, no.

**Mr Sharp**—To put it in very general terms, that would be right. There is meant to be coordination between us and the other government schools, but we do not have much of a formal link with the private schools as to what they do in their courses—and there are some good teachers in all the schools.

But I notice that one of the committee's comments written here is that it is often said that the school curriculum is overcrowded. Every chalkie will tell you that. Everyone is coming at you with a kit to do this or that. There is a lot of stuff to do. Now we have people saying, 'History should be a stand-alone subject with a narrative approach,' and all that sort of stuff. That is just one more thing wanting to get in to the curriculum. There is no reason why it should not become part of the curriculum and there is no reason why civics cannot be part of that—Federation, the right of women to vote and all those sorts of things can be incorporated—but everyone is trying to get in with obesity, with this, with that and with every other thing.

**CHAIR**—You are telling us that at the moment, as students go through the schooling process, there is a variable outcome in relation to their level of understanding of electoral matters.

This morning, when we spoke to the AEC, we collectively went down a certain line of thinking. A teacher does a degree but, in the last six months, there ought to be some emphasis perhaps with the help of the AEC on educating teachers about electoral matters so that they can educate their students. Would you support that?

**Mr Sharp**—Would you educate them in another six months on obesity and the need for physical exercise? I am not sure of the best way to go with teacher training.

**CHAIR**—We are starting to get evidence that teachers themselves are not properly equipped to deal with this subject in the classroom.

**Mr Sharp**—I read some of the submissions on your website and I was particularly interested in No. 27, which was from a lady called Yvonne Goudie. She made some interesting points. I thought that some of her participatory ideas about getting kids involved and so on were very good. That is why I was going to show the kids this scene from the movie *Election* starring Reese Witherspoon. But it does raise a point. If you have seen the movie, you will know that one of the students says, 'This is all rubbish; it doesn't mean anything. You get to be school president but it stands for nothing'. I think that is true with many of these things. In many schools, the SRC is elected but then has no real power. If you go through all that and do all the election things and so on and it then turns out to be just meaningless, I think kids get a message from the hidden curriculum that we did not intend them to get. Just quoting, you might be reinforcing the idea of their parents that, yes, you have to vote but it means nothing. If you are going to vote, it should mean something.

**CHAIR**—What sort of challenges do teachers of this subject face with their students?



**Mr Sharp**—I get volunteer kids. The kids who come to my class want to do legal studies, by and large. Some of them might just choose it as a fill-in. The challenges for that group are different. It is a pleasure to teach those kids. They are bright, they are interested and they are keen. They want to do stuff. I think the challenges are greater at the compulsory level, year 10, and we will have to deal with that next year. It is a different sort of challenge that teachers in the feeder schools have where there is a cohort of 100 or 150 and they say, ‘Okay, what do we want to do and how do we want to do it?’

**Ms Channing**—There is a perception that it is boring, before you even begin.

**CHAIR**—So how do you inspire the students?

**Ms Channing**—I kind of sneak it into the curriculum. For example, in year 9 we do emerging Australian identity. As part of that, we look at Federation and how it brought about a federal government and so forth and the three different levels of government rather than doing it as a discrete civics class. That works better. There are other things they can do. They can see where it fits into Australian history, so at that stage they gain an understanding of the levels of government and so forth. We also do Australia in Asia and the role of different departments, such as Trade, Foreign Affairs and so forth. I tend to put it in in other units rather than teaching it independently. But I would say that we are still lacking in elements of governance in our school curriculum.

**CHAIR**—What sort of direction do you get from the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training?

**Ms Channing**—A lot of facilities and so forth are brought out and given to the schools. It tends to treat it as a discrete unit, which is where you come into conflict with the whole idea that kids really struggle with it. We also have many new teachers at our school and it is not one of their strengths, so it is a confidence thing with the teacher as well.

**CHAIR**—Do you think teachers do not know what it is that they are teaching?

**Ms Channing**—I think it is partly that. They certainly do not have the confidence that they would have in subjects in which they obviously did their studies. When you are confronted with some of the students that we have, it is much better to be dealing with something that you feel confident in so that you feel you have some control over that, if you are struggling with control of the kids.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Is that a bigger issue with younger teachers than with older teachers?

**Ms Channing**—I think so. People take refuge in what they are familiar with. The NT framework is very broad and you cannot hope to do everything that is in it; it is just overwhelming. You have to make decisions and, of course, people tend to make decisions that support their understanding and strengths rather than decisions that perhaps do not.

**CHAIR**—Do you accept that it is the role of teachers to impart this knowledge, or do you think that the AEC should be more proactive by coming into schools and helping?

**Ms Channing**—I think it would be great if there were people who had expertise in this area who could come into schools. I think that the younger teachers, in particular, would learn as a consequence of that. It might be something that you would have to do on an ongoing basis. It might be something that you could do every couple of years or whatever, which would be of benefit if you were to move from school to school, rather than doing it on a constant basis. Giving them material and seeing how they put it into action and so forth would help many younger teachers. They would need to see it only once or twice to feel they had an expertise and a confidence that they did not have before. I think most definitely there is a role for that.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—And you think the way to make it interesting is, rather than doing it as a core unit, to bring it in through other aspects?

**Ms Channing**—I am not convinced of that. I work with Mr Sharp, who is a very gifted teacher and I think we will miss him a lot. He used to look after SOSE at our school and I felt more confident when he was there, because you could talk with him about such things. At the moment, I am an old girl and I do not feel quite as confident in that regard. I would say that there are problems at both ends, for teachers as well as students.

**CHAIR**—We are not promising this but, if the AEC were to develop a school based program where its officers came around to schools, teachers would not feel threatened by that?

**Ms Channing**—I do not think so. I think they would welcome that. These teachers are young but very receptive and they want to learn. I think they would welcome anything that could add to their skills.

[11.05 am]

**CHAIR**—I note that the students have now arrived. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us this morning. My name is Peter Lindsay and I am the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—My name is Alan Griffin and I am a member of the House of Representatives. I represent a seat in Victoria which is called Bruce. It was named not after a *Monty Python* character but after a former Prime Minister. I have been a member since 1993. I am a member of the Labor Party and also a shadow minister.

**Senator HOGG**—I am John Hogg. I am a Labor senator from Queensland. I am the Deputy President of the Senate and the Chairman of Committees and I have been a senator since 1996.

**CHAIR**—Just for balance, this is a bipartisan committee and I am a Liberal member of the House of Representatives and I am from Townsville. I also get to chair the House of Representatives from time to time. Emilio is here as an observer. He attended this school last year and, before going to university next year, will be working for the member for Lingiari. It is good to have him here too. We also have our inquiry secretary, Sonia. She is a great resource for the committee.

This is a public inquiry, in which you are taking part. It represents formal proceedings of the parliament of Australia, which warrant the same respect as should be given to the parliament. That means you can go to jail if you tell a lie. A transcript of these proceedings will be made and put on the public record. Do not let that worry you. Speak openly and plainly. When we ask you questions, tell us what you think and not what you think we want to hear. Because this is a formal inquiry, I have to make a formal statement before we continue.

I declare open this school forum at Centralian Senior Secondary College as part of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education. The inquiry was referred by the Special Minister of State, the Hon. Gary Nairn MP, on 24 March 2006. The inquiry has received over 100 submissions to date from various parts of Australia. They have been received from a broad range of groups and individuals including teachers and schools; federal, state and territory parliaments and electoral commissions; academics; and governments. Copies of these submissions are available on the committee's website.

One of the major focus points of this inquiry is the quality of education provided to young Australians. The committee has been quite concerned about Australian Electoral Commission reports that indicate that young people are more likely to be underinvolved in Australia's electoral process. Given these studies, the committee is interested in finding better ways of inspiring and engaging young people in that process.

Today the committee is pleased to be speaking with teachers and students of Centralian Senior Secondary College and Anzac Hill High School. We want you all to relax. That concludes the formal part. It is normal in an inquiry for witnesses to make an opening statement. None of you are prepared for that, because we did not tell you about it. But let us test the water. Who might

like to say something about whether they think they know enough about the electoral system in Australia from their studies so far? If no-one wants to volunteer, we might get Ian to nominate somebody. Who would like to start? Be brave and just talk to us. Apparently I have to nominate somebody. Young man over there in the wheelchair, please tell us what you think. Do you think you have been adequately or properly prepared by your education at this school to participate in the electoral process?

**Royceton**—I have a rough idea from being involved in the election of a school captain at another school I attended last year.

**Senator HOGG**—What election processes have any of the young people before us been involved in?

**Gabi**—Yesterday we all had to participate in voting for who would be the house captains of each team.

**Senator HOGG**—How did you do that?

**Gabi**—Each person raised their hand for one of those who had been nominated.

**Senator HOGG**—Did you vote by raising your hand for the person or by filling out a ballot paper?

**Gabi**—We voted by raising our hand.

**Senator HOGG**—So it was not a secret ballot.

**Gabi**—No, but the nominees were outside.

**Senator HOGG**—So it was secret from them.

**Gabi**—It was secret from them but not from the people who voted.

**Senator HOGG**—But it was not secret once they returned to the room, because their friends would have told them who had voted for what nominee. Is that correct?

**Gabi**—Probably.

**Senator HOGG**—Do you think that is a good system?

**Gabi**—Probably not, but it worked for the purposes of voting at school.

**Jack**—Each year at St Kilda college, the school I went to before coming here, the year 9s run the election for school captain—and they still do that today. I think that is what Royceton was talking about earlier. You have to run the whole election. You help the candidates running for captain run their campaign. Everyone in the school votes and their vote is counted. You go up to the hall, where your name is marked off. Then you go over to the ballot box and number off 1 to

4 or whatever it is in order of your preference and the preferential counting system is then used. The year 9s all sit down and count it all up. But it is actually not quite democratic because the vote of each senior and teacher is worth two. They call it very democratic, but it is not really. The votes of those in years 7, 8 and 9 are only worth one.

**Gabi**—That is what we did in primary school in Darwin. A person came and talked to us about how to vote and all that stuff and we each had to vote. That is what we did every year for each school captain.

**CHAIR**—Is anybody here aged 17? There are three. Are you already enrolled to vote?

**Jack**—I am planning to.

**CHAIR**—Do you know that you can enrol now to vote?

**Jack**—Yes.

**Unidentified Student**—No.

**Jack**—You can enrol when you are 17, but you cannot vote until you are 18.

**Senator HOGG**—That is right, and you then automatically go onto the roll when you are 18. Gabi, when will you be 17 or 18?

**Gabi**—Next year in September.

**Senator HOGG**—So you have a while to go yet.

**Gabi**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Who thinks it is important that you enrol to vote when you turn 17 and why do you think it is important?

**Emil**—Because there needs to be a greater voice amongst kids. Many kids—even a lot of those who enrol to vote—just do not know their stuff anyway. So it is sort of semi-important for the outcome of the country.

**CHAIR**—Who here thinks—and be brave; do not worry about the person sitting next to you—that it is not important? Who here does not see a need to enrol to vote? Does anyone here think that?

**Daniel**—I think it is important to vote, but to enrol when you are 17 is not particularly important. It is more important that you just enrol.

**CHAIR**—What would encourage you to make sure you do enrol at 17?

**Daniel**—Making it easy to do.

**Senator HOGG**—What would make it easy?

**Daniel**—I do not even know the process used to do it.

**Senator HOGG**—How many people know the process you would use to enrol? Nobody.

**Jack**—Isn't it just filling out some basic forms?

**Declan**—Before or after you enrol, I think you get a package.

**Senator HOGG**—No, you will not get a package before.

**CHAIR**—What about the suggestion that packages be sent to the schools so that all 17-year-olds got one? Would that make it easier to enrol to vote?

**Declan**—Definitely.

**Laura**—I do not really see the importance of enrolling at 17. I mean, you have to enrol and vote when you are 18. When you are 17, you are just growing up and everything. I do not think kids at that age need to have enrolling on their minds when they just have to do it the next year.

**CHAIR**—But, if it were made easy for you, as has been suggested here, you would do it.

**Laura**—Yes. If it were made easier, I would probably do it. That would give you preparation time as well.

**Ms Channing**—That presupposes that all kids are still at school and that becomes an issue, I suppose. If kids are involved in TAFE studies, I suppose packages could be sent to TAFE. But probably the kids who are less likely to be enrolling anyway should be the ones to be identified. They are the ones who are going to be left out of the loop, in a sense.

**CHAIR**—Let us try to get an idea here about whether there is a greater propensity for males or for females to want to enrol as soon as they reach 17. What is your view on that? Do you think that males think about it more deeply than females do, or is it the reverse?

**Declan**—I do not think any substantial line can be drawn.

**CHAIR**—The research shows otherwise, but I am interested in your views.

**Senator HOGG**—We know what the research says.

**CHAIR**—Who do you think is more likely to want to enrol as soon as they reach 17?

**Jack**—It would be females.

**CHAIR**—I think you are wrong.

**Gabi**—It would be males.

**CHAIR**—Girls, why do females have less of a propensity to want to enrol?

**Emily**—Wanting to vote is less of an ego thing for females.

**CHAIR**—What about a view from one of our Indigenous students? What is your ethnic background, Emil?

**Emil**—I am just multicultural.

**CHAIR**—It is just a bit of this and a bit of that; is that right?

**Emil**—Mongrel. I just think most males would have a greater want to vote than females would because females, when they fail school, go on into retail and males, when they fail school, go on into labouring most likely. That is harder work for more money, but it is a lot shiftier through tax and all that stuff. They want to be more secure about the kind of work they are doing, because it is sort of like a cutthroat business they are in. That is just an idea.

**CHAIR**—Girls, do you want to say anything?

**Gabi**—Perhaps that conclusion could have been drawn because Australia's population is male dominated.

**Senator HOGG**—It is the other way around, I think. There are more women. So get your bloke early. There are not enough of them to go around.

**Hannah**—Perhaps that results from females taking their lead from the fact that males are fairly predominant in parliament and they are better heard because they are in higher positions. Obviously, John Howard, Tony Abbott and Peter Costello are all males. Perhaps women are taking their lead from that fact.

**CHAIR**—Can I confess to you all that I have unwittingly misled the parliament? I got the research wrong. This is what it states:

Intention to enrol.

Young people are less likely to enrol to vote than older groups. Of those under the age of 17, four out of 10 males and half the female students intended to enrol at age 17.

So it is the females who are better; you were right:

Of those over the age of 17, less than three out of 10 males and a third of females had actually enrolled.

So there is an intention to enrol but then they do not follow through.

Awareness of the possibility to enrol at 17 is low.

I apologise for having misled you. When it comes to voting—after you enrol, turn 18 and are going to vote—how important is it to vote? I think only four out of five youngsters actually go and vote. How important is it to vote?

**Gabi**—I think it is very important.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone think it is not important to vote? Say so if you think so.

**Declan**—I do not think it is very important. But it is important in that, if you are prepared to whinge about the way an election has turned out, you have to be prepared to vote; you cannot say, 'I did not vote' and also whinge. You cannot blame everyone else for a party getting in that you do not want if you have not voted. In that respect, I think it is very important.

**Hannah**—I think it is very important to vote, but I also think it is really important to be well informed. If you are not well informed, you are just going to go, 'One, two, three—that person.' Australians sometimes get known as being a bit apathetic and whingeing but not going to vote. If you are going to do a donkey vote, it is probably not worth it, because the outcome will end up not being what everybody wants.

**Jack**—I agree with Hannah that it is important that you should be aware of the circumstances and who you are voting for and why you are voting for them. In our country we are so lucky to have the democratic right that we have; people have died trying to get that right. We should not just take it for granted and we should all be as aware as we possibly can and try to use that democratic right.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—But you guys are fairly switched on to this sort of stuff. How do your mates, your friends, the kids who are not here today feel about it?

**Jack**—Just personally, a lot of my friends could not care less.

**Emil**—That is right. They would not have a feeling one way or the other.

**Emily**—It is not high on the list of priorities of a lot of my mates who are turning or have just turned 18.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Why do you think it is not high on their list of priorities? Would that be because of their studies?

**Emily**—They are a bit more interested in partying, I suppose, and being allowed out legally for the first time.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—How many of you know who your federal MP is? Hands up.

**Jack**—Four or five definitely know who their federal MP is.

**CHAIR**—Do the next part of the test.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Which part would you like me to do, Chair?

---



**CHAIR**—You could find out if they actually have the name right.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Hands up again if you know. Who is it?

**Declan**—Snowdon.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—How many know who your state MP is?

**Hannah**—Would that be Clare Martin?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—She is the Chief Minister. Who is your local MP?

**Ms Channing**—That varies according to where you live.

**Declan**—I think mine might be Alison Anderson.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—So even most of you, who are a relatively switched-on group with an interest in the area, are not aware of who your federal or state MP is. That is not unusual, I think. Beyond that, obviously then your friends would not have a clue in that situation.

**Jack**—Yes.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—What do you think needs to happen to make them interested enough to care about what is going on in this area as you guys seem to be?

**Daniel**—I think it is more a personal thing. It is up to you whether you care or not. It is not about how easy it is. It is only if you want to care that you will care about who your federal MP is and about voting and all that sort of stuff.

**Hannah**—It is also hard to care when you are not informed. Going back to what we talked about at the start, I think it is about a lack of education about the electoral system.

**Gabi**—I agree with what Hannah has said.

**Declan**—Some sort of direct political education is needed in the middle years and maybe in year 10 in high schools, such as some sort of citizenship education—and there has been a bit of talk about that recently. People need to be made aware of it, even if they are not interested in it. Perhaps it should be forced down their throats, because it is something that people need to know about, even if they are not interested in it. You need people to vote.

**Jack**—I think it is hard to care when people do not feel the need for change. We live in a pretty good country where the lifestyle is so easy. People say, ‘If it’s not broken, don’t fix it,’ so why take an interest in trying to fix it? That is what politics is sort of about—making reform and change.

**Senator HOGG**—How many people in the room here, either as part of their studies or just out of interest, have gone to either the parliamentary website to look at what happens in federal parliament or to the AEC website to find out about elections and electoral processes?

**CHAIR**—There are nine. Well done, guys.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Do you think it is a crap site?

**Emily**—We had to go to the APH website yesterday because of you.

**Senator HOGG**—To find out who we were?

**Emily**—Yes.

**Senator HOGG**—Tell us what you found out.

**Emily**—Not a great deal.

**Senator HOGG**—So you did not find it a helpful site?

**Emily**—We had a fire alarm halfway through, which pretty much distracted everyone. By the time we got back, our lesson was over. We had done it before that right at the end of a lesson and not much had come out of it. For homework, we were told to go into the website. I tried to get into it and could not get in.

**Hannah**—I printed off the role and the history of the committee and who the members were. I think that was really the basics of what we needed to know. So I thought it was pretty user friendly.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—In the context of understanding or learning a bit about the system to try to get an idea of how it all works, do you think it works at that level?

**Hannah**—No.

**Senator HOGG**—I think it would be worth while noting that addressing the parliamentary sites is something worth pursuing.

**CHAIR**—Is voting more important for younger people or for older people?

**Emily**—Younger.

**Jack**—It should be more important for younger people.

**Gabi**—I think it would be relatively the same.

**Emil**—The older people know what they are doing and there is that much conspiracy with TV stuff. The Liberals get more time on TV to run their ads to influence the younger people. So the

younger people do not know what they are on about and might be voting the wrong way for the country.

**Gabi**—You do not learn just from television.

**Senator HOGG**—What makes you think older people necessarily know what is better? What makes you think that younger people do not have the capacity to make that judgment?

**Emil**—Younger people do but only a small percentage of them. Older people work and pay taxes. The only thing they find fun on TV is the news, so they watch that. I know that now. I hate TV but all of a sudden I am watching the news all the time. Older people know what they are on about and are more experienced.

**Casey**—I reckon you have to have both older and younger people; I do not think there is a line in between. The younger people are just coming out into the world and seeing things in a new perspective. They have all this independence now and they have to learn to work with it. But older people, who have had that independence for a long time, think they know what needs to be changed and things like that. So I think you need both people.

**Gabi**—Older people influence younger people as well.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Do you all have a view about politics—Labor, Liberal or whatever? How many of you have the same political view as held by your parents?

**CHAIR**—Hold that question for a minute. This young man wants to make a comment on the previous question.

**Ben**—I think it is more important for young people to vote, even if they make a mistake, just so they can learn from doing it.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Going to Alan's question, who would openly admit today that in their voting intentions they follow what their parents do?

**Senator HOGG**—We are asking whether you would be influenced by your parents. We do not want to know how you would vote; we are not asking that question.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Who would do the reverse of what their parents do?

**CHAIR**—Right. Who thinks they have a sufficiently open mind to be capable of making their own decision? Fantastic. We have just seen that there is an open-mindedness in this group.

**Senator HOGG**—Yes, but we should also note that this group is probably skewed in the sense that it does not represent the total school population. These people are either involved in legal studies—I do not know about the students from Anzac Hill.

**Gabi**—I am not involved in legal studies.

**Senator HOGG**—Thank you, Gabi.

**Gabi**—Nicki was.

**Mr Sharp**—Only to a small extent.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—How many of you have faced any disciplinary procedure recently—been suspended or otherwise for unauthorised absences? No.

**Ms Channing**—Quite a few of the Anzac Hill students are on the debating team and are very interested students.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—You may have to be described in the context of this sort of stuff as being fairly switched on or interested.

**Jack**—The ones who are not here are probably those who are not switched on, because they do not want to be here.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Exactly. Frankly, we need to know more about them than we do about you in that situation.

**Gabi**—But I do not think that is it, because only a small group was chosen to come over here. You did not get a choice.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—I am not complaining about that. I am just saying that part of what we are looking at is the question of what we need to do about civics and electoral education in order to get to people who are not switched on to it. So it is a question of trying to find out what might work for you—

**Gabi**—You could introduce a class.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—That is part of what we want to talk about. A class is okay but you may have kids who do not want to go to classes. If it were an elective, they would not choose it. If it were compulsory, the questions would be how long it would go for, when it would be taught, what age groups would be involved and things like that.

**Emily**—They have gone ahead with this middle school rubbish—middle school system.

**CHAIR**—‘Rubbish’, you first said.

**Senator HOGG**—That is all right. You have described it as you see it.

**CHAIR**—Explain what you mean by that.

**Emil**—They have introduced middle school as being years 7 to 8 and made year 10 into senior students.

**Senator HOGG**—And you do not think that should happen.

**Emily**—We have year 10s here. But, if they try to introduce a politics class compulsorily, that will get through to them; going by their statistics and so on, it will get into their heads better.

**Daniel**—If you want to get more kids involved, you need to maybe tie a politics class in with a primary school class—maybe humanities or something. If you did a politics class, I do not think you would get the sort of thing that you want.

**CHAIR**—Because this is being reported to the parliament and will go on the Australian parliamentary record forever, we need to get everybody's name up on that site, so every one of you will have to make some comment. Those who have not made a comment so far—no, Gabi, you have had a go—I would encourage to do so. In that way, we can get all of you on the parliamentary record.

**Gabi**—I have a comment about when to introduce it. I think it should be introduced during primary school. I know that students are not as rebellious and they are more open minded when they are younger compared with when they are older.

**Rachel**—When you are teaching kids about politics and that sort of stuff, you have to make sure that you are not showing them only one side of the picture.

**Laura**—If you introduce lessons about politics and stuff into primary school, I do not know how much of it would actually get through to the kids. Because they are young, I do not think they would really care that much about politics and stuff and it would go over their heads.

**Carli**—I think if you try to teach primary school students when they are very young, they will say, 'I've got years and years to wait before I need to worry about this stuff; I don't need to know it now,' and they would kind of zone out.

**Nicki**—Maybe it is not so much about giving them lessons about how parliament works and how this is involved. Perhaps you should just start to develop a slight appreciation of politics and government but not a direct lesson.

**Declan**—I am with Nicki. With regard to the last couple of comments, obviously you will not start teaching them the same stuff you would teach year 12s; it will be adapted for them to understand. I also think it is a good idea to have a bit of interest created when they are young.

**Hannah**—Jack, Declan and I have just been on an NT youth parliament trip and we debated whether there should be a civics and citizenship class. I think definitely it is a good idea. I really disagree with a comment about younger kids. I think younger kids are underestimated. You can start off with basics about politics and they will pick it up and learn. Also, I know that here they have a humanities subject. I have just come from a school in New South Wales where they have human society and the environment. I think pretty much every state across the board has a subject it can be incorporated into.

**CHAIR**—Do you still have your notes from that debate?

**Hannah**—I do not—and we actually opposed it.

**Jack**—We opposed it just for argument's sake.

**Casey**—I am originally from Victoria and in grade 6 we went to Canberra for an end-of-school trip and we went to parliament. We went inside and saw the Senate and the House of Representatives and everything. Then we went and held a mock parliament. I remember that our whole class—there were about 20 of us there—was really interested in everything that was going on. We all had a specific role to play and it really opened our minds to everything. Even being in grade 6, I thought it was really good.

**Gabi**—We did that in grade 7.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—With respect to those 20 kids, were they all interested before they commenced that class? Was it just a set class?

**Casey**—Yes, we were interested.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—So everyone in that class was interested before they got there.

**Casey**—Yes.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—So it was not as though suddenly people were all interested as a result of being there.

**Casey**—No, because our teacher briefs us on those kinds of things through the year. But we knew about parliament and that kind of stuff.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Was it a legal studies class or just a form class?

**Casey**—Just a form class.

**Jack**—I want to touch on what Rachel said earlier about teaching. If you were teaching a politics class, I think it would be vital to remain neutral in what you were putting across to the students. You would not want to influence them either way in politics, although I know that there is not much of a gap between the left wing and the right wing at the moment.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Do you want to have that debate now?

**Jack**—They probably get enough from their parents anyway, but it would be really important for the teacher to remain neutral and not to influence the kids either way.

**Emily**—I just want to agree with the girl back here and Declan about not putting too much politics into the head when kids are too young. Kids still have to have imagination and everything, and that is when they would start getting information overload.

**Candice**—In primary school and in year 9, it was compulsory to do some legal studies stuff and economics. In legal studies we did a lot of parliament and had mock parliament role plays and had debates and whatever. I think it helps when you do activities like that. I did not really know about parliament until I had to do it in class and I think it is worth doing.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—But you think those role plays help to engage kids who are not interested.

**Candice**—Yes. We did things like playing Kim Beazley and John Howard, leading the different parties, and we learned about the different processes that could be used to try to change things through the House.

**Senator HOGG**—People might address this in answering the question that is currently before the chair: are Northern Territorian students disadvantaged by their remoteness from Canberra? We have heard about people from Victoria and New South Wales accessing the federal parliament. So when answering the question you might address that as well.

**Carli**—When we were in year 6, we went to parliament and got to watch it and every year we do a bit of a session on it. But I think it needs to be a steady thing throughout the year instead of doing just one section of it perhaps at the start of the year and then not doing anything for the rest of the year.

**Emily**—Last year as part of legal studies we went to the parliament that was held in the convention centre here. Before that, I did not have much of an idea at all about parliament; after that, I became quite interested in it.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Would that be the Territory parliament sitting in the convention centre?

**Jack**—Yes. Every second year they come and sit in Alice for a little while and they make the convention centre, which is over near the golf course, the Northern Territory parliament.

**Senator HOGG**—Is the sitting of this committee here today what you expected it to be? In other words, did you think that this is how your federal parliament would operate?

**Emily**—No. I thought it was pretty much going to be an information thing where you would sit up the front and tell us everything and I did not think that it would be recorded.

**CHAIR**—Did you all think that?

**Jack**—I did not have any expectation, although I thought it would be more formal.

**CHAIR**—Are you delighted that we are listening to you?

**Jack**—Yes.

**Emily**—Definitely.

**CHAIR**—But we do value your input. This is very important for our inquiry.

**Senator HOGG**—That is why I asked the question.

**CHAIR**—Well done, Senator.

**Jack**—Can I ask you a question?

**Senator HOGG**—You can ask us anything; whether you get an answer is another thing.

**Jack**—That is right—politicians. What kind of result do you hope to get from all of these questions and answers? Obviously we are not the only people you have been talking to. What do you hope to achieve out of all of this?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—The committee is looking to come forward with recommendations that hopefully will have the support of both sides of politics to go forward to the government about how these issues might be handled in the future. Parliamentary committees sometimes do not get very far. But quite often, if you can get unanimous recommendations that are practical, you can put government in a situation where it will act upon them.

Let us take an issue like this that relates to education and electoral issues, which crosses state and federal boundaries, so it is across different levels of government. Sometimes if you can get recommendations that go across those levels of government and they make sense, you can get joint action occurring. The question from our point of view is: what can we find out about what are the best ways to try to engage younger people particularly and what are the best ways forward in terms of trying to develop educational options?

For example, some of the stuff that has come up so far is whether it is better to do it through schools and, if it is, whether you catch all of the kids by doing it that way. Looking at the Territory, many kids are leaving school at, say, 15 and 16. How do you deal with kids in Indigenous communities and from non-English-speaking backgrounds? Should the Australian Electoral Commission and the state electoral commissions have a greater role in providing that education role? How well trained are teachers to be able to deal with the issues? How relevant is the material that is provided? Are the websites and electronic data sources useful, or are they designed for people with degrees? There are those sorts of points in trying to work out what works and what does not work.

**CHAIR**—I do not think it will surprise you to be told that we are meeting with a group of students in the centre of Australia, with another group of students in the centre of Melbourne and with a further group of students in Cairns, for example.

**Jack**—What about Indigenous communities; are you visiting any of those?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Senator HOGG**—We went to Warburton yesterday.

**Gabi**—Did that help you?

**Senator HOGG**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Very significantly.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—At this stage it is very early in our inquiry.



**Senator HOGG**—It helped us.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—It helped, but we are still getting a sense or a feel for it. If we came back to you at the end of our hearings instead of at the start, we would probably have a bit of a different perspective.

**Jack**—So is this towards the start of it?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Yes, this is towards the start of it. With some of this stuff, we are still trying to work out which way is up, quite frankly.

**CHAIR**—Alan is right. This is a bipartisan committee. When we do committee work, we take our political party badges off and work together in trying to get a unanimous report in the interests of our country. That is the way that parliament should work. You are having direct input now into this process.

**Casey**—Have you been to Victoria yet?

**CHAIR**—No.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Not as part of this inquiry.

**Casey**—If you go to Victoria, I think you will find—because we are so remote out here—they are better educated about parliament and things than students are up here. I came up here from Victoria eight months ago. I just know that from myself and my classmates there.

**Mr Sharp**—Have you considered the implications that might flow from your inquiry being successful? In 20 or 30 years time, when these kids and the next generation have grown into adults and are more literate about electoral matters and parliamentary democracy and all the processes, they might bring to bear some real pressure on politicians.

**CHAIR**—Gabi will be the first female Prime Minister of Australia!

**Mr GRIFFIN**—But what I would say is that it is like my not trying to tell teachers how to teach because teaching is a difficult job. I get plenty of pressure as it is now; there is no doubt about that. If you spent some time in my job, you would understand that.

**Daniel**—Just for interest's sake, what are your views on it? What do you think?

**CHAIR**—It is better that we have an open mind.

**Senator HOGG**—That is what we have come to this inquiry with—a fairly open mind. Many of the things that we will say during an inquiry are completely spontaneous and will feed off the material that you give to us. That is the beauty of these inquiries. There is a certain amount of formality to them, but interwoven into that formality is the ability to glean all the good ideas that you might have. That is why we have Deb recording this for the *Hansard* transcript.

**CHAIR**—Putting aside the electoral process for a minute and thinking about Australian democracy, do you accept that young people are rather apathetic and cynical about it and, if you accept that they are, can you tell us why they are?

**Candice**—I think that young people really do not have an interest in it as much as adults do. Many people would admit that and go with whatever their parents think. I think they only really take an interest when it is something to do with them, such as having curfews on teenagers and that sort of thing. If it is about things that are more to do with adults, we will not really have an interest because those things do not affect us yet.

**Gabi**—I think people's minds can be moulded and changed, if you were to introduce it at a younger stage.

**Tara**—I have not really cared about politics before. I am still a kid who is growing up and I have other things to worry about like getting my licence and a car and saving up my money and things like that. The curfew for teenagers and the middle school thing did affect me and then I took an interest. When they wanted to shut down our school, I did not want that to happen, because my friends are in younger grades and so on, so I took an interest in that and now I know a little more about politics. But, until it affected me directly, I did not care.

**CHAIR**—So you are explaining the politics of self-interest.

**Tara**—Yes. It is more about personal interest and stuff. Going back to the electoral thing that occurs when you turn 17, it is more about the individual and whether they want to do it. I probably will not do it because I cannot be bothered and I have other things to learn about. But when I am 18 I will do it.

**Emil**—Just as Gabi and Tara have said, we have to get to them young or they probably will not care until it hits them. But I think it should be compulsory for all junior levels to start by being educated about the freaky truth of climate change and environmental issues and then to blend it with politics and tell them why they should not bludge off the dole and all that sort of stuff.

**Hannah**—I definitely accept that youth are apathetic. I think it is because they feel their vote will not count anyway, which shows a lack of education. Tara has said that she has better things to worry about, like getting her licence. I would say that licensing has to do with the laws. If you are made aware that things that you do not think are related to politics actually are, you will take more of an interest.

**Jack**—Touching on what Tara said earlier, I think a lot of youth today do not think about what is happening now and how it will impact on their world tomorrow. They only think about their immediate future, like their schooling and what-have-you. They do not think about what will happen tomorrow or 10 years down the track, such as how the new IR laws will affect them or, as Emil said, the impact we are having on our environment and how we need to change that for the future. They are only thinking about, firstly, themselves and, secondly, what is happening today and not tomorrow.

**Emily**—Young people do not see things as being quite that important to them, even such things as the new industrial relations laws that were passed recently and the fact that soon we will be going out into the workforce and getting jobs that are not casual any more. We do not quite realise that our jobs are not stable any more and that kind of thing.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—How do you get information; do you get it off the TV?

**Jack**—TV, parents, teachers and the internet.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Radio?

**Jack**—Yes.

**Emily**—It depends on which station you listen to.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Who reads the newspapers?

*(Approximately two-thirds of the students raised their hand)*

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Do most of your friends read newspapers?

**Emily**—No.

**Declan**—No.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Where do your friends get information from?

**Declan**—*Today Tonight*.

**Gabi**—It's on before *Home and Away*.

**Senator HOGG**—Should all this education be done through *Home and Away*? I'm not being stupid.

**Laura**—I reckon that would work, yes.

**CHAIR**—How many of you watch *Home and Away*?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Oh come on; more of you than that would watch *Home and Away*.

**Laura**—About five of my friends every day come up to me at school and say, 'Oh my God, did you watch *Home and Away* last night?' Then they start telling me the basis of the story and so I hear about it every day.

**Ms Channing**—And I wonder how many people are lying.

**Rachel**—I may not watch *Home and Away*, but my 11-year-old sister does, so she might learn something from *Home and Away* if you were to do something like that.

**Unidentified Student**—I don't see how you could work that into *Home and Away*.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—To give an example, if you were looking to run ads to encourage people to enrol to vote and say something quickly about why it is important—

**Gabi**—I think those ads are annoying.

**CHAIR**—Students, we are almost out of time. Would anybody like to ask us a question? It can be about whatever you want. We have to get a question from somebody who has not said something yet. What about you guys? Think of a question while we are taking these questions.

**Laura**—When you guys were young and at primary school, did you care much for politics?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Back in those days, there was no television.

**Laura**—If it had been incorporated into lessons back then, do you think you would have taken to it and cared about it?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Yes, but we are a bit weird. We are people who have dedicated our lives to that stuff.

**Laura**—But what about when you were younger?

**Mr GRIFFIN**—I was weird when I was young.

**Senator HOGG**—And he still is weird now!

**CHAIR**—And, for me, that was 10 years ago, so I cannot remember; that is too long ago!

**Mr Fabijan**—Will these students have opportunities after today to think about what has gone on and to respond in some way to this committee?

**CHAIR**—They can respond by contacting Sonia, a member of the committee's secretariat. The details are on the website, under 'Committees'. You can make a submission to the inquiry, if you want to. Have you guys come up with a question?

**Sam**—This might be a bit off the topic, but will we be getting our boys out of Iraq any time this year?

**CHAIR**—What is your interest in that subject?

**Sam**—I have a couple of mates who have been over there. They keep nagging to me on the phone about it.

**CHAIR**—Iraq is a messy situation, as you know. We will leave as soon as we can. I expect—I do not know what the other committee members expect—that it will be within 12 months. But what you never hear out of Iraq are all the good things that are being done over there. You hear about all the bombings that happen all the time, but you do not hear about—

**Jack**—You do not hear about all the bad things either.

**CHAIR**—But you do not hear about the water and electricity supplies, the newspapers, the plethora of radio stations and the mobile phone networks that are all up and running.

**Matt**—What are the current political interests in the Israel-Lebanon situation?

**CHAIR**—I was in Tiberias, Israel, four weeks ago, which was rocketed from Lebanon. This conflict has been going on since the year dot—thousands of years. It is fuelled by raw hatred. It is horrible. The academics say that there is only one solution to all of this—and it applies to the whole of the world where terrorists are involved. Moderate Islam is a religion just like Christianity, Judaism or Hinduism and basically has all the same beliefs. Moderate Islam has to rise up across the world and say, ‘We utterly reject these fruit loops who claim to be Islamic but, in fact, do not represent what Islam is all about.’ They have to speak with one voice and say very clearly, ‘We reject these people.’

The second thing that must occur is that, whenever a terrorist atrocity occurs, it must be dealt with with a strong response. You have seen some strong responses by Israel; probably the world has been saying that they are over the top. But there must be no doubt in the minds of the terrorists that, if they do something to one country, they will get it back in spades—which is a shame for the people being killed; it is horrible.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—We do not have enough time to go through all of this, Matt, as it is a huge issue. Having been there, I can understand why the Israelis have reacted in the way that they have; but at the same time I have a lot of sympathy for many Lebanese people who are being put in an untenable position by what has occurred. It is a conflict that has gone on for centuries. The problem that you get into in those areas is that, yes, there is a terrorism overlay but there is also the fact that almost everybody has had someone hurt or killed. So the problem is that there is an underlying level of anger, hatred and distrust, and those sorts of things take generations to get over.

There is no simple solution to it; there is no easy answer. There needs to be a ceasefire and a separation of the forces, and those things need to happen sooner rather than later. We do not know how soon that will be. It appears that the Israelis are committed to creating a buffer zone in the interim and we have to see where that takes the situation. But I take the UN view on this—the sooner they stop shooting at each other, the better the chance of trying to resolve it long term.

**Hannah**—I have a personal interest question. Obviously, you have to be well informed and on the ball about everything that is going on in the world. How do you mainly get your information? I watch Sky News on AUSTAR pretty much every day.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—I watch it too. Firstly, we are not on top of everything; it is not possible. We are sort of like home electricians—we know just enough to shock ourselves on almost

everything. We get information from all sorts of sources. People come at you all the time, depending on the area. You tend to specialise in various things. Sometimes that will relate to your own interests and sometimes it will relate to your electorate. Peter has an abiding interest in defence matters, because Townville is a major defence base. I have a heavy NESB area, with lots of people who have come to Australia from different countries, so I have an interest in some of those issues. It varies accordingly.

**CHAIR**—The system sends us a lot of information.

**Senator HOGG**—If it is any guide to you—and this is not leaking anything that is not public knowledge—many of our intelligence forces gain much of their information from CNN news, because they seem to be on the spot. That is just one source. But then one has to make a judgment as to how well they are reporting what they are reporting. In other words, you then have to make a subjective decision yourself as to the veracity of the way in which that is being reported.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—To give an example on the issue in the Middle East, circumstances are that we will get briefings coming through from Palestinian and Arabic and from Israeli sources. If we are really interested, we can get information from the Parliamentary Library as well as from general news services. Sometimes it will be from constituents from our own areas. It depends on the actual issue.

**CHAIR**—We have to wrap this up. Students and teachers, thank you for your participation. Students, you are fine Australians. It very much encourages us to hear how good you are.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Griffin**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 12.01 pm**