



**Inquiry into Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU486)
Bill 2005**

The Senate, Community Affairs Committee
Parliament House, Canberra ACT

Women's Electoral Lobby Victoria supports the bill and submits the following points for discussion

1. Lawful abortion is available in Australia and is a surgical procedure. The bill before the senate committee is not concerned with religious or philosophical matters but purely examining the responsibility for the use of the medical drug RU486 (mifepristone).

2. RU486 is currently available for women in almost all civilised countries.

The procedure has been used and tested for over 10 years. The Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Gynaecologists have advised governments that, with appropriate medical supervision, it is a safe and effective alternative to surgical abortion.

3. The decision to choose a method for lawful termination must always lie with the woman and her doctor

4. WEL Victoria rejects any suggestion that politicians should have control over women's bodies

Men would certainly object to such control over their own bodies.

Political considerations should never interfere with a medical decision.

For instance it would be outrageous if there were political interference in the procedure of male circumcision which is of course also a religious custom.

5. Neither moral nor religious considerations should impact on medical decisions in a secular society.

6. The Therapeutic Goods Administration is eminently qualified to make scientific assessments and should decide on the safety of Ru486 in the same way as it deals with other drugs.

NOTE The committee may be interested to learn the results of a 1982 Victorian State election.

In the electorate of Monbulk –an outer area of Melbourne- a Right to Life candidate stood against the sitting member Mr Borthwick in the Victorian State elections of 1982. The Freedom to Choose Coalition included WEL Victoria and supported Dr Bert Wainer who stood as a ProChoice candidate and although placed last on every How to Vote ticket, he polled 9.7% of the vote compared to the Right to Life candidate who polled only 2.5%. Dr Wainer even outpolled the Democrat.

Second and third preferences were carefully scrutinised and it was found that 13% of ALP voters and 10% of Liberal voters broke the ticket to place Wainer above the Right to Life candidate.

The result indicates that politicians need not fear that the electorate will support a Right to Life position. Indeed the results reveal the majority of voters are in favour of a woman's Right to Choose.

Below is a copy of the published report with all results and comments.

WEL Victoria urges Senators to support the bill to remove political and religious interference in all drug assessments and to allow a woman and her doctor consider all possible medical procedures in what is a very traumatic event.

Sincerely

Kerry Lovering

WEL Vic Convenor

**FILE UNDER
“A” FOR ABORTION
“E” FOR ELECTIONS**

**ABORTION AS A SINGLE ISSUE
IN A STATE ELECTION**

MONBULK, VICTORIA — APRIL 1982

RESULT — FIRST PREFERENCES

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Dr. WAINER (PRO-CHOICE) | 9.7% |
| Mrs. LANGWORTHY (RIGHT TO LIFE) | 2.5% |

**Right to Choose Coalition
November, 1982**

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EXPLODING A POLITICAL MYTH

On Wednesday, March 10 1982, the Right to Life Association nominated Mrs. Jean Langworthy as a candidate for the seat of Monbulk in the Victorian state election. They stated that their aim was to unseat the Minister for Health in the Liberal government, Mr. Bill Borthwick. He held his seat in the 1979 election by a majority of only 2.2 per cent.

On Friday, March 12, Dr. Bertram Wainer also nominated for the seat of Monbulk. He stood on a RIGHT TO CHOOSE platform and received the unanimous support of the RIGHT TO CHOOSE COALITION.

The RIGHT TO CHOOSE COALITION was formed in 1981 to fight the anti-choice people.

It consists of a wide range of women's organisations including the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), the Union of Australian Women (UAW) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The Coalition is not a political party and its constituent organizations include members of the Labor, Liberal and Australian Democrat parties.

Waiver's objective was to give voters a means of expressing their opposition to the Right to Lifers. There was no intention of supporting either the Liberal candidate, Borthwick, or the Labor candidate, Mr. Neil Pope. The Democrats nominated Mr. Milton Blake.

THE ELECTORATE

Monbulk is a large electorate spread over the foothills of the Dandenong Mountains about 50km from the centre of Melbourne. The population has changed rapidly in the last five years from a community of older retired persons to one of younger families. There are pockets of rural workers and some migrants also live in the area. It is a one hour drive from Melbourne, and many people commute to work daily. At the time of the March election there were 32,748 people on the Monbulk electoral roll.

THE CAMPAIGN

The Lifers' campaign consisted of paid advertisements and interviews reported in the local papers, posters on lamp posts and trees, public meetings and the extensive postal distribution of leaflets printed in America. These leaflets were inaccurate and horrifying. A telephone campaign reached between 10-20 per cent of the electorate. They had \$50,000 to spend on the campaign.

The pro-choice campaign was co-ordinated by Jo Wainer, wife of the candidate; she had \$2,000 to spend. It started slowly but in about two weeks more than 150 women and men gathered from all over Melbourne to offer their help with door-knocking.

Many local people were incensed by the Lifers' unscrupulous campaign and they came to help distribute leaflets, door-knock, hand out howto-vote cards, and scrutineer.

The political parties were astonished at the support for Wainer and somewhat dismayed that his campaigners included many of their traditional supporters who felt that their parties had allowed themselves to be mesmerized by the imagined power of the Lifers' to direct votes away from targeted candidates. Waiver's supporters were united in their determination to show, once and for all, that these zealots were a tiny minority with no power outside their own small circle.

THE RESULT

The Monbulk election demonstrated that the Right to Life movement does not have sufficient supporters to influence the outcome of even a closely fought election. In particular, they were unable to control the direction of preferences of those few people who did support their candidate. They won only 2.5 per cent of the primary vote, and 3 per cent of

their supporters actually put Wainer second on their ballot paper. Wainer attracted 9.7 per cent of the primary vote, and a total of 12.4 per cent after preferences were distributed.

The Lifers failed in their avowed intention of directing votes away from Borthwick. Of those who gave their first preferences to Langworthy, 36 per cent placed Borthwick before Pope in conflict with their how-to-vote card. In contrast, only 32 per cent of Waiver's supporters put Borthwick ahead of Pope, although Wainer did not direct preferences. Thus, the Right to Life campaign to direct preferences away from Borthwick had no effect.

| PRIMARY VOTE | | | DISTRIBUTION OF PREFERENCES | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| TOTAL PRIMARY VOTE | | | | | |
| Blake (Australian Democrats) | 2001 | 6.71% | Borthwick (Liberal) | 12843 | 43.0% |
| Borthwick (Liberal) | 11727 | 39.31% | Pope (ALP) | 13288 | 44.5% |
| Langworthy (Right to Life) | 737 | 2.47% | Wainer (Pro choice) | 3703 | 12.4% |
| Pope (ALP) | 12477 | 41.82% | | | |
| | | | ALP margin over Liberals | 445 | |
| Wainer (Pro-choice) | 2892 | 9.69% | | | |
| TOTAL FORMAL VOTE | 29834 | 100.00% | FINAL DISTRIBUTION | | |
| | | | Borthwick (Liberal) | 14025 | 47.0% |
| Informal | 748 | | Pope (ALP) | 15809 | 53.0% |
| TOTAL ENROLLED | 32748 | | ALP Win over Liberals | 1784 | |

COMMENT

Wainer gained almost 10 per cent of the primary votes, exceeding the combined vote for the Democrats and Right to Life.

Before the distribution of Wainer's second preferences there were only 445 votes between the two major candidates. Thus Waiver's preferences were crucial to the outcome of the election. Of his 3703 votes, 1 182 (32%) went to the Liberal candidate, and 2521 (68%) went to the ALP.

Distribution of the 737 Right to Life

preferences resulted in 269 (36.5%) going to the Liberal Party and 468 (63.5%) to the ALP.

Distribution of the 2001 Australian Democrat votes resulted in 919 (46%) going to the Liberals and 1082 (54%) going to the ALP, mainly through Wainer.

The Lifers tried to capitalize on a predicted swing to the ALP by targeting a Liberal member in a marginal seat. They finished by delivering more preferences to the Liberals than Wainer did.

MAJOR PARTY PREFERENCES

Both the major parties presented how-to-vote tickets in which Wainer was placed in the last position (No. 5). The ALP ticket put Langworthy of the Right to Life in position 4, while the Liberal ticket had her in third place. The votes from each polling booth were counted and recounted separately and it was possible to scrutineer one quarter of the primary vote for the major parties and thus to gain an unbiased sample.

A sample of 3350 (27%) ALP primary votes showed that 428 (13%) ALP voters had been motivated to change the order of their vote from that on the ALP ticket in order to put Wainer in second or third position on their ballot papers, above the Right to Life candidate. Only a handful (1%) of ALP voters put Langworthy in second or third position. A further 6 per cent of ALP voters placed Wainer in fourth position above the Right to Lifer.

Liberal Party supporters followed their party ticket more closely than ALP supporters. Even so, from a sample of 2998 (26%) of Liberal primary votes, 309 (10%) put Wainer in third or fourth position above the Right to Life. Less than 0.1% of the Liberal voters put the Right to Lifer in second position. Noted, but not counted, were Liberal voters who put the Right to Life in fifth position, below Wainer. This means that more than 10% of Liberal voters were prepared to break the party ticket to vote in support of a women's right to choose a legal abortion.

DISCUSSION

In a country where preference votes can have as much weight as first votes, a group which wishes to influence policies must be able to control its preferences in order to deliver votes to the desired candidate. This the Right

to Lifers failed to do. The 468 second preference votes they directed to the ALP represented only 1.6 per cent of the total votes cast for the ALP. These votes almost certainly came from traditional Labor supporters. The Lifers' remaining 269 second preferences ended up with Borthwick, against the direction of their ticket.

The Wainer campaign demonstrated that at least 10 per cent of voters were angry enough, or concerned enough at the tactics of the Right to Life, to use their first vote as a protest against the Lifers and as a demand to governments to continue to allow access to abortion.

The second and third preferences of the major party voters are interesting as a comment on the policies of those parties. The sample of more than a quarter of the primary votes of the major parties showed that at least 10 per cent of the Liberal voters and 19 per cent of the ALP voters were prepared to break the ticket to vote for a pro-choice policy on abortion.

The major parties underestimated the importance of this issue to their supporters. As a result, there were a number of informal votes which came from supporters diverging from their party's ticket and attempting to change their vote in order to put Wainer above Langworthy.

Results in Ballarat South and Ivanhoe, where Lifers also targeted candidates, indicated a sympathy vote for those candidates. In Monbulk, voters had an alternative way of voicing their opposition to the Lifers, and they took it.

Indeed, the Wainer campaign helped both the major parties by allowing people to vent their disgust for the Right to Life by voting first for Wainer and then for the party of their choice - as recommended on Wainer's how-to-vote card. That so many people did so shows that when an issue is presented to the electorate clearly, and when preferential voting is explained explicitly, as it was in Wainer's campaign material, then voters are sophisticated enough to use the electoral system to express their attitudes.

CONCLUSION

- Wainer out-pollled the Right to Life by 4:1
- Right to Life were unable to control more than 64% of their preferences
- The swing to the ALP in Monbulk was the same as that across the state.
- The outcome in a marginal electorate was unaffected by the Right to Life campaign
- If there are votes in abortion, they are in favour of a woman's RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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