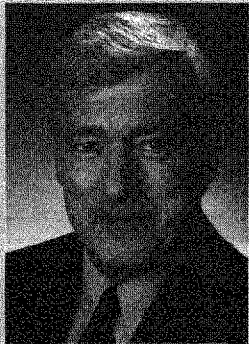




28 February 2006



Peter Andren M.P.
Federal Member for Calare

The Secretary,
Finance and Public Administration Committee,
Australian Senate,
Parliament House,
Canberra.

**SUBMISSION ON ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM
AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND OTHER
MEASURES) BILL 2005**

Dear Secretary,

I firmly believe the proposed legislation does very little to advance our democracy, our parliament or our electoral processes.

I do not have difficulty with the proof of identity requirements on enrolment to vote. Likewise the equalisation of tax deductibility for donations to independents has long needed attention, although I believe a cap on spending by individual candidates, and AEC audit of individual candidates, is required to reduce reliance on donations.

The appalling and anti-democratic aspects of this legislation are highlighted by the following provisions in particular.

Closure of Rolls: *Item 52.* The seven-day window for closing of rolls should be maintained. This provision has the potential to deny many thousands of people, particularly young people, the opportunity to take part in an election. Thus, it is anti-democratic. If we wish to encourage people to engage in the democratic process we should not be legislating to reduce that opportunity.

Prisoner Voting Rights: *Items 14, 15 and 16.* Likewise, the restriction of voting rights for prisoners is not only anti-democratic, it removes an avenue for prisoner rehabilitation that should encourage prisoners to take part in the election process.

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Media Returns: *Items 75 and 82.* The proposal to remove the requirement that broadcasters and publishers lodge returns relating to electoral advertising effectively closes off any public (or media) examination of election spending in individual electorates or across the broader electorate. Coupled with the 'nil return' practice in political party returns, such a move would completely block any attempted examination of spending in the 150 House of Representatives campaigns across the country.

Lifting of Disclosure Threshold: *Schedule 2.* This 'reform' is the most blatantly political and anti-democratic measure in the legislation. The raising from \$1500 to \$10,000 of the donation limit below which a declaration need not be made, moves our political system inexorably towards a situation like that in America, where full-time fund raisers are part and parcel of the political process, where political campaigns become a battle between the ever-increasing budgets of competing parties.

I will be moving amendments to the legislation to highlight this fact and try to encourage a cap on the amount of money that can be spent in total on an individual candidate's campaign by the candidate or any other person, organisation, union, church, party or corporation. Similar caps operate in several countries, notably New Zealand, and I believe they are the only way of controlling the potential, if not the reality, of political influence being bought. Another important reason is to maintain the playing field as level as possible for all candidates in elections, so as many people as possible have the opportunity to run for public office, regardless of means.

If the government (and the major parties) were serious about levelling the political playing field (and of course I and the wider electorate are naïve for thinking it possible) then they would also support provisions in this legislation forbidding government advertising during the period of an election campaign.

They would also support the removal of above the line voting from the Senate ballot paper and allow for partial-preferential voting. This would require a vote in preferential sequence equal to the number of candidates to be elected. At the moment an independent candidate is required to lodge a how-to-vote card (or maximum of

three variations), even though I and many other independent members and candidates don't direct preferences in lower house elections as a matter of policy and philosophy.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendments (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005 is seriously flawed and seriously reduces, rather than improves, our democratic processes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Andren". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

PETER ANDREN
Member for Calare