

ACCOUNTABILITY

PREMIER AND CABINET
VICTORIA
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS

2006

OUR ELECTION COMMITMENT

The Hon Don Chipp once said the role of the Australian Democrats was to "keep the bastards honest". In other words, to hold governments to account for their actions, defend and enhance democracy and enfranchisement, insist on procedural fairness, act in the public interest and open the legislative agenda of government to parliamentary and public scrutiny.

For a century the Victorian Parliament has been constrained in holding governments to account by government majorities in both houses or control of the upper house by obstructive oppositions.

THIS TIME the Legislative Council is not likely to be controlled absolutely by the government or the opposition. THIS TIME the voting system will see a parliament that is more representative of the political mix of the voting public.

THIS MEANS the Democrats could hold the balance of power and deliver on our commitment to bring openness and transparency to government, reform parliamentary processes and properly scrutinise legislation.



The Democrats commitment is for:

Electoral Reform

- Establish a constitutional review process to consider:
 - > introducing quota-preferential-proportional method of election in both houses of parliament with the Council made up of five regions with 9 members elected at large in each. (This would increase the number of MLCs to 45 facilitating a properly functioning committee system),
 - > establishing a strict limit per candidate for election campaign spending,
 - > removing the minimum requirement of 4% of the vote for eligibility for public election funding,
- Display candidate how-to-vote cards in polling booths and prohibit handing them out at polling places (as in the ACT).
- Establish political party governance standards, including procedures for preselection of

THIS TIME AN UPPER HOUSE THAT WORKS

Our vision for accountable government in Victoria is one that:

- governs for the greater good, rather than the vested interests of the influential few,
- enhances democracy by maximising eligibility for voting, minimising the benefits of incumbency and ensuring Victorians can cast an informed vote,
- insists on the highest level of integrity for its ministers and those who serve them, and
- maximises the engagement of parliamentarians and the general public in decision-making and keeps a check on the power of the executive.

- > entrenching the Constitution so changes must be approved by referenda rather than merely through an act of parliament, and
- > establishing equivalent legislative powers in the Assembly and the Council (as in the Senate).

A U S T R A L I A N TM
DEMOCRATS

This election commitment was updated on November 18, 2006
All our election commitments are available online at
www.vic.democrats.org.au

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candidates and party officials to ensure they are democratic, truth in political advertising standards and full disclosure of all types of political party income.

Parliamentary reform

- Establish equivalent legislative powers in the Assembly and the Council (as in the Senate).
- Introduce a Parliamentary Standards Commissioner and reform codes of conduct for members of parliament and ministerial responsibility.
- Require presiding officers to withdraw from their political party involvement and act with fairness and independence.
- At least double the number of sitting days - 38 in 2006 - and reform sitting hours to avoid late night sessions.
- Reform the committee system so that the chairs and members are elected by a vote of the Assembly and the Council respectively.
- Establish Council Budget Estimates where committees are able to question ministers and their departmental staff and, where requested, personal staff.
- Provide up to 10% of sitting time to debate private members' bills and allow for them to come to the vote.
- Confine questions without notice to those asked by non-government members (removing Dorothy-Dixer questions)
- Require questions on notice to be answered within 30 calendar days.
- Establish a procedures committee in each house on

which all political parties are represented.

- Reform the standing orders to require ministers' answers to questions to be relevant.
- Establish a register of interests for members of parliament and require gifts, hospitality and sponsored travel to be disclosed.
- Introduce a five year 'cooling off' period for ministers or parliamentary secretaries to take employment or contracts related to their portfolio on leaving office.

Information

- Codify and limit the exemptions under Freedom of Information rules.
- Establish an ombudsman's role in mediating Freedom of Information disputes.
- Create a fairer, more reasonable fee structure, abolishing many current fees altogether.
- Reduce the time limit for the processing of FOI requests to 21 days.
- Disallow 'commercial-in-confidence' as a justification by government of non-disclosure of information.
- Impose time limits and sunset clauses on all secrecy provisions.
- Publish on the parliamentary website the details of all Government contracts worth \$100,000 or more (as required in the Federal Senate).
- Tighten the guidelines for publicly funded government advertising campaigns ensuring they are used strictly for the

necessary dissemination of information and represent no more than 2.5% of annual expenditure (currently 5%).

Government performance

- Ensure that the government cannot delay unreasonably the public release of performance reports, particularly on major projects.
- Empower parliamentary committees to refer matters to the Auditor General.
- Require Auditor General oversight of all major contracts.
- Establish a Commission to oversee all public-private partnership contracts to protect the public interest and public assets.

Appointments

- Ensure that all public appointments are made on the basis on merit and that political affiliation is not used as a criterion for appointment.
- Establish an independent body to establish codes of practice for appointments and their oversight.

Whistleblowers

- Set up an independent authority to receive and investigate whistleblower disclosures.
- Make it an offence to engage in reprisals against whistleblowers.
- Compel authorities receiving public interest disclosures to act on them unless frivolous or vexatious.
- Establish proper procedures for employees to report impropriety and corruption.