

**Submission
No 71**

INQUIRY INTO ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

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Electoral and Political Party Funding

Today's SBS News featured a story about campaign financing in the USA - an issue I researched when living in Washington DC in the 1980s. At that time, the public interest group Common Cause produced a report, 'How Money Talks in Congress', that shed considerable light on how money buys votes in Congress -- something no American is proud of. Today's SBS story referred to the required transparency of US campaign finance law. Australia needs such laws and should implement them with the benefit of the US experience.

As a dual American-Australian citizen, I know that Australia can benefit from the experience of other countries. American campaign finance laws are not perfect, and they certainly have not prevented the 'buying' of political influence, but at least they provide for transparency - something that is seriously lacking in Australia.

As a public health professional, I have also seen first-hand the monetary influence of groups that oppose public health initiatives - groups like the Australian Hotels Association, licensed clubs groups, and the former Tobacco Institute of Australia (still incredibly powerful as individual companies).

In reforming electoral and political party funding, I would like to see the NSW Government consider the following:

1. Measures to increase transparency in the source of donations, including:
 - (a) prompt and transparent reports at least quarterly and in the month before an election, to a public website maintained by the Election Funding Authority;
 - (b) requirements for party committees or other fundraising bodies to state the sources of their donations; and
 - (c) all funding disclosures should be accompanied by a report from an accredited auditor.
2. There should be caps on donations.
3. There should be a ban or at the very least limits on political donations from organisations, including corporations, trade unions, and a total ban on foreign or transnational entities.
4. There should be caps on total electoral spending by all parties and candidates.
5. There should be tighter controls over "independent" campaign spending by the supporters of political parties and candidates.
6. An independent committee should be established to monitor government advertising campaigns to ensure that public funds are spent for the purposes of public education, not political gain.
7. In local government, public funding should be introduced, private funding capped and transparent disclosure required prior to elections.
8. There should be increased penalties for breaching political funding laws.
9. Adequate funding should be provided to the EFA to enforce these laws.
10. Elected officials should not be permitted to accept donations (direct or indirect) from tobacco companies.
11. NSW parliament should propose to the Federal Government that a national strategy be developed to fundamentally reform - at federal, state/territory and local government levels - legislation in this area;

measures 1-10 above should form the basis of the NSW position at the national level. This Summit should include not just politicians but a wide range of legal experts, academics and community representatives; it should be allowed sufficient time for proper consideration and comprehensive debate of all reform options.

Margo Saunders
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