



From: Matthew Doherty
Sent: Tuesday, 29 October 2013 3:59 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: Electoral reforms

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021 Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary JSCEM,

I recently worked on the Federal election and have reflected on this issue over a number of years. I don't believe recent results show that the Federal electoral system is broken but I do believe it requires modest, incremental reforms.

The first matter that demands attention is the Senate ticket. As someone who worked on a polling booth in Werriwa, NSW, I had to struggle to keep a straight face as I told people their voting options. One number above the line or 110 numbers below. I personally voted below the line as I had the time on my hands during a pre-poll vote; however even I needed to concentrate very hard to not spoil my paper through oversight. The overwhelming majority, even when they were aware of the problems inherent in allowing others to decide where their preferences would be distributed, chose to vote above the line. Now the results of such a short-sighted system are clear in the number of unforeseen [although not unpredictable] victors.

One solution to this obvious shortcoming is to allow **preferential voting above the line**. That is, arguably the present system functioned reasonably well in times past with small (and predictable) lists of candidates, but with a table-cloth sized Senate ticket this is no longer the case. And closely linked to this is the move to **optional preferential voting** in the Senate, where one need not fill in every box above (or below) the line for it to be a valid vote, see my argument below. Both of these reforms merit substantial consideration by the Joint Standing Committee.

And to the House of Representatives. My main concern here is to see **optional preferential voting** at federal elections. Not only would this make a difference in practical terms, allowing for more simplicity consistent with a greater proportion of valid votes, it is in fact a denial of an individual's liberty to force them to [ultimately] vote for one of the two most popular candidates in any list (usually the two major parties). Being able to exhaust one's vote short of indicating a preference for every candidate, as is the case at NSW state elections, is clearly the preferable outcome. Indeed the good functioning of the NSW system indicates that this reform would not result in unforeseen negative outcomes.

I hope these simple suggestions receive the genuine consideration at the JSCEM that they deserve.

yours faithfully,
Matthew Doherty