

Sent: Monday, 24 February 2014 9:15 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: Electoral process Issues.



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

To whom this may concern,

The 2013 Federal election highlighted some serious problems with the electoral process. I have personally worked on elections for many years in the capacity as polling clerk official and Officer-in-Charge of a polling booth. Although my personal experiences within the booth have been totally by the book, with every ballot paper accounted for, the electoral process itself has been eroded in its security over the years.

With the size of the Western Australian ballot paper, to lose 1370 of these massive pieces of paper should be almost impossible. This is a massive box of paper. There is a very serious problem here. I remember the old days, where security was very tight-this would have been impossible without armed transgressors storming in. It would be very easy for the electoral commission to rent secure storage vaults for the duration of the election. This could be in the electoral office or in a bank. The delinquent way the poll was conducted in Western Australia is a disgrace that is going to be a severe impost on the tax

payer. Those millions wasted would have paid for a large number of security measures. Given that the incoming government has had to engage some austerity measures, it will impact on the new ballot-fundamentally unfair the delay we are seeing – it is anything but timely. Given the popularity of pre-poll voting, there really is no reason why preliminary sorting and counting could not be carried out. I believe it will become even more popular with time. It should not be too difficult to update the rolls from the prepoll roll. It will eliminate some of the potential fraud. Perhaps, prepoll voting could not occur on the Friday prior to polling day for the electoral office staff to update their rolls.

It is well known that deceased persons have had their identities stolen for the purpose of illegal voting. Given that it would be nearly impossible to detect the live person that multiple voted and the deceased can hardly be charged, not that the penalty is high, this should be a high priority. It would be safe to assume that those committing the fraud would cast a significant number of votes. This dilutes the vote of legitimate law abiding citizens. In addition, the per vote funding arrangement results in defrauding the public of tax dollars. It is quite likely that savings of unwarranted funding are more than the additional cost of monitoring Birth, Death and Marriage records. It would not be all that difficult to have the records sent electronically to the Electoral Commission on a regular basis. If rolls are kept and updated electronically, the cost is just a computer program!

The old system where voters went to a single booth to vote where their name was on that roll almost eliminates multiple voting. Now, busloads can go from booth to booth. I have anecdotal evidence that this happens, although proof positive is impossible as it is illegal to film voters in the polling booth. A bus with 40 people visiting 25 polling booths in the course of a day with false identities of either deceased, late enrolments that cannot be verified or names of those they know have pre-poll would bring in 1,000 extra votes(and 4 thousand dollars funding from the taxpayer) which is enough to secure a marginal seat quite comfortably. The potential for this type of fraud must be eliminated. We supposedly live in a Democracy. I dare say, most of us would not like the idea of a Government being decided by a few busloads of fraudulent party faithful(or even non-citizens who could fly out of the country well before fraud was even suspected.) If you think about it, the sort of political party that would need to cheat to gain power is not the sort you would actually want running our nation. Given the rules on filming voters casting their votes, it is impossible to ascertain which political entity perpetrated the fraud. Although technically feasible, filming voters casting their vote is something that we NEVER want to happen EVER. It is a certain bet that such capacity will inevitably be abused. The inconvenience of going to a specific polling booth would stamp out the ramifications of most of the above fraud scenario. Remember, with the increase of pre-poll voting, queues will be shorter on polling day itself and finding names on the roll will be easier and faster. The small inconvenience of

attending a specific polling booth outweighs the potential for just one busload of committed party faithful swinging the vote to NOT reflect the will of the people.

Postal voting mediated by political parties should simply be banned. Really, anyone who could think it could possibly be fair would have to have rocks in their heads. Think about it-why would they use precious resources to perform the Electoral Commission's job if there was nothing in it for them? It is inherently corrupt. If official looking sites to gain those postal votes are discovered, they must be taken down immediately and fines apply. If the infringements are too frequent, the offending candidate could be disbarred from candidacy. This would have to be proved to avoid sabotage from political foes. It would be fairly easy to monitor the post boxes the postal votes go to.

The rule that members of political parties be ineligible to work on polling booths is probably unworkable and could be regarded as discriminatory. It is common knowledge that party members do work as election casuals. Perhaps a declaration on party membership can be made with extra monitoring of these people or assigning them to non-sensitive roles. Provisions for hefty punishments for deliberate politically motivated dereliction of duty should be legislated. Really, who would oppose say 30 years in jail for this sort of fraud? Many people working on polling booths have their own political convictions, but do not belong to a party.

Voter identification at the point of ballot paper collection would identify multiple voters, although a committed fraudster could still multiple vote. A large fine would deter almost all potential multiple voters. Single booth voting would reduce the need for voter identification as the potential for fraud is significantly reduced. Even still, many forms of identification, especially a driver's licence actually speed up the process for the polling officials. In my days on the booth, I can personally attest to this.

New enrolments too close to polling day have been a traditional way of fraudulent and ineligible entities gaining a "right" to vote. If there is inadequate time to verify the new voters, then they either have to vote in their previous electorate or lose the right to vote for that current poll due to their own negligence alerting authorities.

The preferential system of voting is inherently biased toward the major parties. We are FORCED to direct our preference to one of the 2 major parties. In the past, savvy voters could quench their votes by making them invalid past the order of their preference. They could disenfranchise the major parties. What if it should transpire that all major parties conspired to act contrary to Australian voters interests? This is not as crazy as it sounds. We all know branch stacking occurs and there has been infiltration of political parties which could not be regarded as being in the best interests of the generally politically apathetic public. The 2pp system biases toward the 2 major parties. If the collusion scenario were to occur, the consequences for Australia

would be dire indeed. It would result in a totalitarian regime.

Australians have tasted the sweet nectar of freedom and it is to our liking. A totalitarian regime created from a collusion of the preferred major parties would be totally devastating. The Electoral system in the past prided itself on its tightness. We have seen a loosening of the system that provide the loopholes through which the unethical and undesirable can slip. A return to the old system that gave discerning voters the ability to withdraw support from ALL the major parties and some minor parties if they had lost the trust of the voters is something that should be an inalienable right.

Electronic voting is something that could be considered, as names would then be marked off all rolls to prevent multiple voting. Counting of course would be much faster and paper use reduced. It would have to be unusually well designed to prevent unethical hacking to manipulate the vote in the computer. The computer system alone is not sufficient to prevent voter fraud.

Initialled ballot papers must be declared informal ONLY if there are too many ballot papers in the count-more than can be accounted for. It is impractical to expect voters to check the initialling. Initials on the front of the paper is easier to check and faster for the polling officials (having been on the coal face here). The count will be faster(do not have to look at both sides of the paper) and discerning voters and polling officials should be able to pick an omission easily.

Pencils are so archaic for marking ballots. There is potential for alterations on a wholesale scale by an unethical group. The sort of unethical group that would do this to steal an election is one we most certainly do not want in power. Pens would cost little more and eliminate this potential. Think about it, the lost ballot papers in WA could have easily been rubbed of their pencil marks and remarked if so desired. 1370 votes altered like this would certainly be more than enough to change the destiny of an election. Given how tight the Senate is currently (July 1 at any rate), this would have a very adverse effect on the balance of power.

This is not a complete set of ideas, but I have stressed ones that I have first hand knowledge of from decades of polling place work and insight from political type people from my circle of acquaintance.

Jim Sternhell