

Select Committee into the Political Influence of Donations  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
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Dear Committee Members

There has been a lot of commentary and opinion polling over the last few years that suggest that many Australians have lost faith in our federal political system and its ability to guide us through the myriad of problems and challenges that face the country: climate change, energy reliability, cost and sustainability, housing affordability, same gender marriage....

One issue that feeds into the mix is public donation funding. I suggest it does not matter whether the risk of inappropriate influence of this funding model is actual or perceived, the damage is done: citizen disengagement with government and its institutions is the result.

How much money is involved and at what harm to the profession of governing and its outcomes?

I understand we are talking about \$30M/yr in public donations, and a further \$10M/yr election expenses from Treasury. Please excuse me if I am out with these amounts, the point is that this order of magnitude is insignificant compared to the deleterious effect on the standing of our political and parliamentary bodies in the minds of the community, and the distraction of our politicians, away from the deliberations of governing, to the raising of donations.

The supporters of the public donation system claim that one of its benefits is that it facilitates access of the donor to parliamentarian. But this system raises ethical, fairness and good governance issues. Politicians' allocation of time should be on the basis of the national interest not on the necessity to raise funds and reward donors with access opportunities.

And the matter of foreign donations and misuse of associated entities would be solved with a move to government funding.

On a lighter (alternative) note, should you determine that (substantially) the current funding system should remain, I propose that a statutory body (say Donations Australia) be established to receive all donations on an anonymous basis, with only the intended recipient party be disclosed to DA. DA would then disguise the donor by part payments to the recipient party spread over several months. Severe penalties to apply for disclosure by the donor or staff of DA. Would this lead to a demise of the current funding system? I expect so.

Thank you for the opportunity to have a say and good wisdom with your deliberations.

Yours faithfully

Jon Shirley