

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
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Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017

I would like to address my submission to the bill's intention to regulate what are described as "new political actors".

For the record, I am not, and have never been, a member of any political party or "associated entity". However I do occasionally contribute to citizen actions undertaken by various activist groups including: Change.org, ACF, AMCS, Climate Council & Get-Up!

Citizen advocacy groups' recent emergence has been facilitated by Internet communication allowing virtually instantaneous dissemination and collection of information. What attracts me to these independent groups is they provide a channel through which I can engage positively in public debate in a meaningful manner: as opposed to merely shouting at my television set! Their strength derives from the aggregation of like-minded folks reminding our elected representatives of their obligations to their electors and the land they represent. I contend that any attempt to curtail the activities of these groups represents an attack on our democracy. The people have a legitimate right to be heard before, during and after electoral cycles.

My reading of the proposed legislation suggests it seeks to entrench adversarial polarization in Australian "winner-take-all" Machiavellian politics. The "level playing field" Senator Corman purports to support has never, and will never be achieved in a democracy where the dissemination of political information, or misinformation, is facilitated by private funding. Private funding of election advertising fosters plutocracy! Two examples: Australia has witnessed an industry organization undermine and effectively depose an elected prime minister; we have seen obscene fortunes poured into advertising campaigns pumping simplistic three-word slogans and emotional irrelevancies. A working democracy requires a well-informed and enlightened electorate. I contend that, in our current political landscape, dominated by donations from entrenched vested interests, independent activist groups exist to inform and so actively engage the population in political debate. In fact, in these circumstances, they create a more balanced "playing field"! In an environment where the press is increasingly partisan, activist groups have become legitimate sources of independent information that all too often exposes political propaganda. It is indeed sad that our political system has become so perverted that we, the people, need activist groups to hold governments and political parties accountable for their actions. Activist groups would simply cease to exist if governments and major parties were transparent, committed to our living environment and committed to the "common wealth".

I submit that regulating and curtailing the independence and activities of citizen advocacy groups runs counter to Australia's democratic principles and practices.

If senator Corman were genuinely interested in a genuinely "level playing field" he would move to fundamentally overhaul our electoral process by banning all private political donations. All political donations, no matter how small, are intrinsically corrupt! Publically funded election campaigns could thus be more modest in scope, grounded only in published manifestos, subject to rigorous independent research and analysis, rational debate, and above all truly democratic.