

## Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Australian Electoral Commission

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Supplementary Estimates Hearing – October 2010

#### Outcome 1, Program 1.2

Topic: Community campaigning theory and associated entities

Question reference number: F86

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 3 December 2010

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Senator Abetz asked:

Is the AEC aware of “community campaigning” theory which holds that the way for political activists to shift votes is not so much to advocate policy or ideology, but to engage on issues of importance to sections of the community and in doing so shift support in the direction those political activists want?

I would like to quote from a Wikipedia entry entitled, *Common aspects of 'community organizing groups'*, which will give you the idea:

*Organizing groups often seek out issues they know will generate controversy and conflict. This allows them to draw in and educate participants, build commitment, and establish a reputation for winning. Thus, community organizing is usually focused on more than just resolving specific issues. In fact, specific issues are often vehicles for other organizational goals as much as they are ends in themselves....*

My question is, in principle,

- a) does the AEC admit, that it is possible for an associated entity, or even a third party - as their modus operandi - to use issues as fodder in order to funnel votes in the direction of certain political parties?
- b) Is the AEC also aware of the principle that this form of campaigning isn't so much concerned about ideological inconsistencies as pushing in the broad direction desired? (Perhaps it might like to examine the literature in these areas.)

#### Answer:

(a) The AEC has examined the theory referred to in the question. However, this theory on its own does not advance an examination of whether or not the activities of a particular entity falls within the requirements of an “associated entity” listed in subsection 287(1) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act) and the 11 factors listed in the answer to QoN F84.

(b) The relevance of this theory to the requirements contained in subsection 287(1) of the Electoral Act is not acknowledged by the AEC. It is a question of fact in each case to establish whether or not an “entity” “operates wholly, or to a significant extent, for the benefit of one or more registered political parties”.