



Joint Media Statement from Senate and House of Representatives Crossbenches 19 March 2024

Crossbenches unite across Parliament to push for electoral reform

New legislation will be introduced in this sitting by the crossbenches in both houses of Parliament to show that essential electoral reform can be implemented before the next election.

The Fair and Transparent Elections Bill will be introduced by Senators David Pocock and Larissa Waters in the Senate and Kate Chaney MP in the House of Representatives, having secured near-unanimous crossbench support.

The Bill proposes to improve transparency, protect voters from outright lies, reduce financial influence, level the playing field and limit excessive donations.

It proposes a real-time donation disclosure threshold of \$1000, tightens political donation definitions, bans donations from social harm industries and government contractors, limits governments using taxpayer funds to advertise before elections and cleans up data harvesting in the postal voting process.

It also proposes a major donor cap, to prevent any individual from donating more than 2% of the public funding paid for the last election.

The crossbench has taken this approach to ensure the government isn't pressured into watering down its electoral reforms to secure support from the Coalition, and to avoid the changes being delayed until after the next election.

If the Bill is adopted by the government, the crossbench has indicated it would support the legislation being passed by both houses of Parliament to enable the reforms to be implemented ahead of the next election.

Comments attributable to Kate Chaney MP, Independent Member for Curtin:

"The government has committed to transparency and truth and we're demonstrating that it doesn't need to wait for opposition support to get this done. There's a majority in both houses that wants to see these reforms before the next election.

"Voters deserve to know who is funding their candidates and be protected from outright lies in political advertising. They also deserve to know they have a competitive choice of candidates.

"We know that the Liberal Party doesn't want reform on transparency, reducing financial influence or levelling the playing field. It seems likely they will only be willing to do a deal with the government if that deal embeds the two-party system and makes it harder for new candidates to get elected.

"This Bill provides the government the opportunity to show it has listened and is interested in reforms that build trust, not changes that embed the two-party system."

Comments attributable to Queensland Senator Larissa Waters, Australian Greens Senate Leader:

"We've been waiting 18 months for the government to come good on its promise to reform electoral laws to reduce the influence of big money on political decision making. The crossbench has used that time to draft our own joint bill, which has the numbers to pass both houses of parliament if the government got on board.

"People are sick of democracy being for sale, and big donors calling the shots. This Bill would stop the huge sums of money from dirty industries with a track record of trying to buy favourable policy outcomes.

"History shows that electoral reform proposed by the major parties has in-built loopholes to ensure their own big money is retained, while hampering the chances of any challengers.

"Any reform which limits donations to those who challenge Liberal and Labor, while protecting the establishment parties' sources of income, will be seen for what it is - a complete stitch up, undermining our democracy, and the public's expectation of fair play."

Comments attributable to Australian Capital Territory Independent Senator David Pocock:

"Our Bill, being introduced concurrently in both houses with the support of our crossbench colleagues, gives this Parliament an opportunity to enact serious and long-overdue electoral reform before the next federal election.

"We live in a well-functioning democracy, but we have seen this increasingly under threat and must act now to improve our democratic processes.

"This Bill puts forward sensible, best practice changes that have wide ranging support and will increase transparency and accountability of politicians and political parties during elections, ultimately strengthening our democracy.

Comments attributable to Zoe Daniel MP, Independent Member for Goldstein:

"Just as it's illegal for companies to lie to consumers so it should be illegal for politicians to lie to voters.

"Disinformation and misinformation are reaching epidemic proportions in politics, undermining voter confidence in democracy. If the government really wants truth in politics and real time donation transparency it can support this Bill right now. There is no need to wait for the Opposition to catch up."

Comments attributable to Dr Helen Haines MP, Independent Member for Indi:

"As an Independent MP, I have worked hard to improve transparency and accountability in politics. Alongside my community I successfully campaigned for a federal integrity commission, which is now in place. I am continuing this work through my End Pork Barrelling Bill to bring accountability to how taxpayer money is spent.

"It is the crossbench that is doing the heavy lifting in the fight for integrity in federal politics. I am proud to support the Bill. Australians deserve to know who is funding the major parties and now is the time for robust electoral reform."

Comments attributable to Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie, Jacqui Lambie Network:

"The Labor Party talks a big game on donation reform but when the rubber hits the road, they vote with the Liberal Party to protect their donors.

"It's only independents and micro-parties (like the Jacqui Lambie Network) that are prepared to fight for what the Australian people want - a Parliament that is transparent and accountable, that's why they are voting for us in increasing numbers."

Comments attributable to Dai Le MP, Independent Member for Fowler:

"This Government talks about doing politics differently. We've yet to see that. This is an opportunity to provide transparency and level the playing field, so our community has trust in the political process."

Comments attributable to Dr Monique Ryan, Independent Member for Kooyong:

"Labor and the Liberals combining forces to rewrite electoral laws is like Coles and Woolies rewriting competition law. Electoral reform is incredibly important, but it must not be a Trojan horse designed to protect the party duopoly."

"One in three Australians voted for a minor party or Independent at the last election. There are real concerns that instead of working to actually listening to voters, the major parties could game the system to make sure voters listen to them."

Comments attributable to Dr Sophie Scamps, Independent Member for Mackellar:

"A donation cap is necessary to address the Clive Palmer effect on elections. Wealthy individuals and powerful companies should not be able to effectively buy their way to power and influence, or sway elections by making multimillion dollar donations. It is unhealthy for democracy."

"The donation cap proposed in this Bill is sensible and balanced, and future proofs our democracy."

Comments attributable to Rebekah Sharkie MP, Independent Member for Mayo:

"If we want a healthy democracy, the surest way is to get big money out of politics! While in Opposition, the Government supported my Private Member's Bills to lower the donation disclosure threshold, require real time disclosure of political donations, and expand the definition of gift to include fundraising events and the like."

"I'm disappointed that since taking Government, however, these reforms have not been made a priority. These changes need to be made before the next Federal election."

Comments attributable to Allegra Spender MP, Independent Member for Wentworth:

"Electoral reform is long overdue, and I share the public's deep concerns about the increasing influence of big money in politics."

"But Australians want to see reforms that level the playing field and restore integrity to our electoral system, not a major party stitch-up designed to entrench incumbents and give people less choice. The crossbench is ready to work with the government to remove the loopholes in our donation disclosure regime and to stop the blatant lies in election advertising."

Comments attributable to Zali Steggall MP, Independent Member for Warringah:

"Transparency and integrity reforms are long overdue. The crossbench has tirelessly advocated for crucial measures like truth in political advertising and real-time donation disclosures. With support from the crossbench, Labor, and Greens, these reforms could be passed ahead of the next election, fulfilling the wishes of Australian voters and strengthening trust in our political system."

Comments attributable to Victorian Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe:

"For too long, Labor and the Coalition have taken people in this country for a ride by distributing lies, using public money to gain votes, and raking in dirty donations. Fossil fuel companies and other harmful industries are some of the biggest donors to the major parties and have far too much power over our political system."

"This can be seen in the destructive decisions made by successive Labor and Coalition governments, who are literally selling out Country, climate and people."

Comments attributable to Kylea Tink MP, Independent Member for North Sydney:

“Transparency, accountability, and truth are sorely lacking in Australian politics, so reform like this should be welcomed. Importantly, this Private Member’s Bill ensures these principles are not used cynically to simply embed a two-party duopoly, recognising democracy is at its healthiest when it is based on a true contest of ideas.”

Comments attributable to Andrew Wilkie MP, Independent Member for Clark:

“It’s deeply disappointing that again it’s left to the independents to lead the charge for greater integrity measures, and in particular political donation reform. This Bill is a solid blueprint which the Federal Government would be wise to support, or at least to stop talking and get moving with their own reforms.

“Until there is change Australia’s political donation and disclosure rules remain little better than the brown paper bags of cash passing hands in countries that we are so quick to criticise.”

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