



## ACCOUNTABILITY SPOKESPERSON

# Jobs for the Boys

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**A**ccountability as an issue has become a political winner of late.

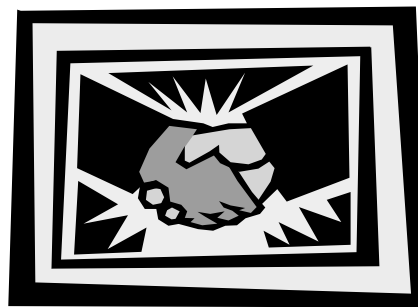
Oppositions of both political persuasions have tried to make political mileage by claiming the moral high ground in transparency measures in their policy platforms.

This is not to say that good work is not done in the process.

WA Opposition Leader, Dr Geoff Gallop has made some genuine contributions towards more open government in this State. One always fears, however, that this enthusiasm for accountability could miraculously evaporate on election night.

New governments often perpetuate the bad habits of the old. "Jobs for the boys" is an example.

Australian citizens commonly see that the first actions of new governments (such as the Bracks Labor Government in Victoria) is to announce a raft of inquiries into the dealings of their predecessors. Funnily enough, while such



inquiries gather "dirt" on the former government, they seem to always overlook the adequacy of methods of appointment by governments to public bodies. The focus should be on what systems can be put in place to ensure the same events do not recur. The focus should also be on the sorts of people running the show. The phenomenon of "parachuting" the mates of a new government into lucrative positions on various boards and authorities, at the expense of the taxpayer, continues. Yet, the adage of "jobs for the boys" should be an anachronism in 2000.

No Government, no matter how good its intentions, can deflect the public perception of such ap-

pointments as being rewards for party hacks or others who have assisted the Government to gain office. Further, this perception can damage the reputation of these bodies, as in the public eye they are seen as being

controlled by persons who lack the appropriate independence and who may not be as meritorious as they might be.

The Australian Democrats are concerned to ensure that wherever appointments are made to the governing organs of public authorities - whether they be institutions set up by legislation, "independent" statutory authorities or quasi-government agencies - that the process by which these appointments are made is transparent, accountable, open and honest.

In the absence of Federal legislation dealing spe-



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# Jobs for the Boys

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cifically with this issue, the Australian Democrats have had to fight to amend each piece of legislation dealing with these bodies to include standard provisions setting out an accountable regime governing such appointments made by Ministers. Yet on every one of the 14 occasions on which we have done so, the Liberal, Labor and National parties have combined to block reform. They clearly see such appointments as being the spoils of Office, and do not want to see this complicated by such abstract notions as accountability to the public or Parliament.

The Democrats have used the work of the Nolan Committee, which in 1995 reviewed the processes for making public appointments in the UK. Subsequently the UK Government established the Office of Commissioner for Public Appointments to provide an effective avenue of external scrutiny on appointments made to public bodies. Some of the guidelines that Office sees as being the most basic protections against jobs for the boys are: that a Minister should not be involved in an appointment where he or she has a financial or personal interest; that all public appointments should be governed by the overriding



principle of appointment on merit; that selection on merit should take account of the need to appoint boards which include a balance of skills and backgrounds; and that the range of skills and backgrounds which are sought for a position should be clearly specified and publicised.

A comparison of these guidelines with the current practice of government in both the State and Federal spheres in Australia shows clearly that we lag well behind the UK in this respect. Whenever inquiries touching upon these issues have been held (usually at great expense), their usually worthy recommendations are given mere lip service.

A clear example is the Commission on Government in Western Australia which, five years on, has seen very few of its main proposed reforms implemented.

Governments appear to believe that these issues do not matter to the electorate, and will fade from the political agenda by election

time.

Yet it is becoming clear that this is less and less the case. Accountability matters to voters. The public is rightly sceptical about the processes of government appointments. They think "jobs for the boys" is a euphemism for snouts in the trough.

We lack the external scrutiny mechanism in the form of a Commissioner for Public Appointments at both levels of government, but more fundamentally we do not have even basic procedural safeguards.

This should be redressed as a matter of public importance, with a far higher priority attached to it than has hitherto been the case. Failure by the major parties to recognise the way in which such issues become a real point of focus in public debate will be at their own (deserved) political peril.

The next election in Australia will be in Western Australia. Mr Court has the old "jobs for the boys" system.

Will Dr Gallop promise a UK type regime to clean up government appointments? Fourteen times so far his Federal colleagues have voted to keep the spoils of politics - "jobs for the boys". Any bets?

**Profound public discontent over poor ministerial and parliamentary standards during 1999**



**"Accountability matters to voters. The public is rightly sceptical about the processes of government appointments."**

## Major political parties reject push for accountability test



prompted the Australian Democrats to try to again broker a solution.

I attempted to introduce into the Senate a Notice of Motion which would result in the creation of a multi-party working group to test the current Codes of Conduct and guidelines. The Notice of Motion was defeated in the Senate by the Coalition and the Opposition.

Community scepticism about ministerial accountability is warranted when the Coalition and the Opposition continually fail to back their rhetoric on ministerial standards with enforceable action.

forceable action.

This is not the first time the Coalition and Labor parties in the Senate have voted against real attempts to improve the poor levels of accountability in our government.

I have grown weary of the Prime Minister's attempts to manage ministerial accountability, with his codes of conduct and guidelines being steadily watered down since their introduction in 1996.

It is profoundly disappointing that Labor too, refuses to take a stand on an enforceable code on ministerial conflicts of interest.

Labor says the best form of discipline is exposure and while that is true after the event, it is surely better to try to stop it occurring at all.

Senator John Faulkner's claim that Labor has reviewed the guidelines in the past and therefore sees no sense in doing it again, falls far short of real accountability. Times have changed and improvements are needed.



**"The Australian Democrats have long argued for a drastic downward revision of the parliamentary super scheme."**

## Spotlight on pollied salaries

**Parliamentary salary increases hit the spotlight again late last year.**

There were three main themes to the community comment in response to the 10 per cent salary hike: pollied are already well paid; pollied should not get increases above the general percentage increases of workers; and pollied should rather, have their pay cut. And of course, the usual stuff about monkeys and peanuts.

To help you form your opinion, this is how it works. I receive \$3438 paid into my account every month, after deductions. That will go up to about \$3800 I think, by July this year. On top of that, I secure use of a car and have

my telephone account paid. I also receive a good superannuation package *if* I last four parliamentary terms. (For the record, the average parliamentary career of an Australian Democrats parliamentarian has been just over four years!)

As for the generous super scheme - the Australian Democrats have long argued for a drastic downward revision of the parliamentary super scheme so it better reflects community standards.



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## Short and Sweet ...

### Independence of the Judiciary



An independent judiciary is one of the cornerstones of an accountable system of government based on a genuine separation of powers.

The federal court system, including the High Court of Australia, must be, and must be seen to be, free from political interference.

This will only be possible if appointments to the federal judiciary are made in an open and accountable way, and selections are based entirely on merit.

### Political Donations Disclosure



The public demand for transparent and fully reported political party funding and disclosure is proper, insistent and must be heeded.

Public disquiet concerning perceived overt and covert links between donations to political parties, and their resulting policies and actions, continues to be very high.

The Australian Democrats believe that political parties should be legally required to provide explicit details of the true sources of their donations and the destinations of their expenditure.

### Secrecy



Openness, accountability, transparency and the public interest right to know are essential principles and protections in a democracy.

Fundamental to the maintenance of these principles is the minimal use of secrecy by government.

Blanket secrecy is inappropriate in government if Parliament is to fulfil its function and remain open and accountable to the people.

Secrecy is only necessary for genuine reasons of security and privacy. 'Commercial confidentiality' clauses are often just a bureaucratic or political device to avoid proper public scrutiny of government documents.

By limiting secrecy, the role of Parliament is enhanced by ensuring openness and accountability in government.

### Whistleblower Protection



Whistleblowers play a crucial role in ensuring the accountability of government. They are individuals who, by reason of their employment, come across information that reveals corruption, dishonesty or improper conduct at any level of government.

When such people bring this information to the attention of appropriate authorities, they must be protected from retribution. Currently, such people are given no protection by the Commonwealth Government.

**We're on the Web!**  
**www.democrats.org.au**

## BUT WAIT ... there's more!

The Australian Democrats has produced detailed information sheets on numerous accountability issues.



If you would like to find out more, just complete the enclosed feedback flyer and send it to us or ring or fax Ainslee McCallum on (08) 9481 1455 and (08) 9481 1679 (fax) and she will post, fax or email you additional information.