


14 May 2009

Committee Secretary  
Select Committee  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601

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|  | <b>A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE<br/>ASSEMBLY<br/>COMMITTEE OFFICE</b> |
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**Re: INQUIRY INTO THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES  
(CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING) BILL 2008**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

ACL is supportive of the object of this Bill, which seeks to prevent the use of public funds for political advertising purposes. We see it as important to the integrity of an incumbent government, as well as to the fair and even nature of an election campaign, that there be careful scrutiny into what is considered necessary or improper advertising by a government leading up to an election.

ACL's submission will focus on two issues:

- e. Misuse by both ACT Labor and the Federal Coalition of government advertisement; [and]
- n. Commitments made in the previous election in regards to accountability.

**Previous misuse of government advertising**

The previous Howard Government was heavily criticised for its advertising campaign regarding its 'Work Choices' initiative. This would have been an acceptable political campaign despite the fact that it used public money. This created a situation where one party, due to their position of power, was unfairly able to gain an advantage in the lead up to an election. We saw this repeated in the ACT Labor Party's 2008 election campaign where advertising using public money was shown regarding community services just before the election. Television advertisement and brochures regarding water, schools, health and other social services were blanketed over Canberra in a way which leaned more towards pushing what good things the government was doing, rather than imparting vital public information. Political parties should fund these advertisements, not the Australian or Territory taxpayer.

### **Commitments made in regard to accountability**

In the 2008 ACT Election, ACT Labor submitted to the Australian Christian Lobby this comment in answer to a question regarding government accountability:

*"ACT Labor is committed to engaging Canberrans on matters that affect our community and aims to improve governance and accountability, engagement and consultation, the availability of public information, freedom of information legislation, government service delivery and public sector capacity."*

ACL would like to see this commitment to accountability delivered. The requirement in this Bill to allow government campaigns to be scrutinised by the Auditor-General is one which ACL believes promotes reasonable transparency and accountability. This will ensure that any advertisement paid for by the taxpayer, which includes comment, opinion or statements promoting the government's performance, will be disallowed. The use of public money through Government advertising for partisan political purposes is clearly inappropriate.

### **Concluding remarks**

ACL is very supportive of the broad aims of the Bill, as measures are clearly needed to curb the misuse of public funds for partisan political purposes. Leadership by the ACT may influence the Commonwealth to also embark on reform.

**ACL ACT Office**  
**May 2009**