


SUBMISSION

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NAME OF COMMITTEE: Select Committee on Campaign Advertising

INQUIRY: Inquiry into the Government Agencies
(Campaign Advertising) Bill 2008

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To The Members of the Select Committee on Campaign Advertising:

On behalf of the Community Alliance Party, I would like to thank you for inviting us to contribute to this important inquiry.

The Community Alliance Party fully endorses the principle of public awareness being funded by public monies, as specified in Section 6 of the Bill. There is no doubt that democratic governments should value their citizens highly and seek to keep them apprised of both new and altered processes across the spectrum of government services. However, during the final weeks of the 2008 ACT Legislative Assembly election campaign, we witnessed both the blatant misuse of public funds and the release of government information timed for personal and party gain.

This type of manipulation was not limited to television advertising that directly touted the Government's achievements, but also included stunts such as the 'official opening' of the Alexander Maconochie Centre, in the full knowledge that the facility would not become operational until well after the election. Similarly, the timing of tours of the Holt Super School (now known as the Kingsford Smith School) was not only a blatant attempt at self-advertising by the Government, but was also aimed at minimising the damage to their election chances caused by the unjustified closure of 23 public schools. Indeed, as documents obtained under Freedom of Information by the Ginninderra District High School's P&C Association confirm, the timing of the Holt Super School's opening was linked to that of the 2008 election as early as 2005.

Whilst it is understandable that any political party or individual candidate would be keen to be presented in their most positive light in the lead up to an election, it is reprehensible that any incumbent would seek to manipulate the use of public monies for what can only be considered their personal gain, namely their re-election or that of their party.

The Community Alliance Party therefore endorses the proposals outlined in the Bill and offers the following additional suggestions:

- 1) If, according to any possible exemption outlined in Section 15, a government campaign is deemed necessary during the 12-week pre-election exclusion period, then the Community Alliance recommends that:
 - a). The pictorial, graphical and verbal content be approved by a committee independent of the Government, regardless of the dollar value of the campaign;

b). The campaign not present the voices or images of incumbent MLAs, or of any candidate registered in the current election. Participation in such campaigns should be limited to persons with direct oversight of the issue at hand, for example, the head of the relevant department rather than the minister;

c). The campaign not involve background footage of anything which might in the public mind directly link the campaign to the incumbent Government. Examples from the 2008 election would include the AMC or the Arboretum.

- 2) That an enforceable dollar limit be placed on election campaign expenditure per candidate and, separately per individual party, in order to promote a level playing field for contenders. This suggestion would be consistent with Section 13(3)(d) that some candidates might have special communication needs.

Should you require clarification of any of the issues raised above, I would be delighted to assist.

Thank you once again for providing the opportunity for the Community Alliance Party to make this submission.

Yours Sincerely,



Jane Tullis

President
Community Alliance Party

28 May 2009