



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
Ms Leanne Castley MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA

Submission Cover sheet

Inquiry into memorialisation through
public commemoration

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Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality

Inquiry into Memorialisation through Public Commemoration

Formal Submission

Details of submitter

Name: Greg Tannahill

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Submission made in my capacity as a private citizen.

I do not represent any group or organisation.

Text of submission

1) Should the government engage in memorialisation through public commemoration?

My primary position in relation to the subject matter of the committee's inquiry is this: the government should not be involved in the memorialisation of individuals through public commemoration.

It is simply impossible to know the substance of a person's life, either while they are alive, or after their passing.

Time and time again we have discovered that individuals who we once respected have, in fact, been sexual abusers, child abusers, perpetrators of domestic violence, racists, bigots, or otherwise people undeserving of commemoration.

And inevitably, the victims of these people are forced to walk past their public memorialisation, and see their abusers publicly feted and acclaimed.

While that unfortunately may be the case whenever society chooses to raise a person to a position of respect and authority, the difference here is that there is no strong public benefit served by the state memorialisation of individuals. There is simply no need for us to do this. Those who give generously to their community are not motivated by the possibility a street might be named after them. Nor are suburb names a replacement for, or even genuinely supplementary to, an appropriate school history curriculum.

I would strongly suggest that the ACT Government's position on memorialisation through public commemoration is that it not engage it at all, and slowly engage in a process of phasing out older names derived from individuals.

Appropriate sources of names for streets and suburbs would be the traditional names of the land's Indigenous owners or names drawn from Indigenous history and folklore; local flora and fauna; inanimate objects; or pure fiction.

2) If the government were to commemorate individuals, what policies should they use?

If we must commemorate individuals, then yes, obviously we should commemorate a wider and more diverse range of individuals than we have in the past.

Our history disproportionately commemorates rich white conservative straight men, largely reflecting the demographics who have held power in our country. An appropriate policy going forward would not only be to select a more diverse range of individuals in future, but take steps to correct the imbalances of the past.

In particular we should look to commemorating the history and present of our Indigenous community, CALD communities, gender and sexually diverse Canberrans, women, and disabled Canberrans.

We should also acknowledge that those who have served Canberra in science, the arts, and education are underrepresented in our public commemorations, while those in military, politics, and sports are wildly overrepresented, and seek a better balance in that regard.

We should perhaps set specific rules against the commemoration of those with incomes above a certain bracket, noting that money too often buys commemoration, and that these individuals are more than capable of commemorating themselves without government assistance.

And finally, I see no particular reason why those we commemorate need to have been born or lived in the ACT - it should be enough that the Canberra community values them.

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This concludes my submission to the inquiry.

With thanks,

Greg Tannahill