

“In Support of Progress” Newsletter

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It's on! No question about it. All political action from here on in is campaign action.

At the Federal level, the rediscovery of western Sydney has been a shock for Labor – it simply is not the place it was. What was once secure is marginal – and to pretend otherwise is to be in a world of delusion. To reinforce the point, the WA election has sent a message loud and clear that federal issues were a factor, and that the carbon tax and the mining tax are vote losers. If the government continues to “hold the line”, as it says it will, then it will see its vote collapsing cross the country. It's simple really. If Labor walks away from its core, then its core will walk away from it.

And yet, without a clear enunciation of an alternative, the electorate will be smothered in “spin”. Spin will not be how good “we” are, but will take the line of how bad “they” are. The debate should be about policy, and direction. We deserve better than the nonsense we are being subjected to.

Same goes for the State. The Premier's State of the State address was more about politics than it was about the state of the state, linked as it was to the release of Labor ads saying how bad the Liberals would be if they won government. And the Liberal response was not much better

Without entering into a partisan debate, both sides seem to find comfort in platitudes rather than reflect an overall vision for the state. Both sides make good points, but it is more aligned to band aids than it is to surgery. Phraseology such as “planning reforms” and being “open for business” does little to provide comfort that there is any understanding of the deep-seated malaise within the community

The government has some scores on the board. Its support of the wine and dairy industries is a recognition of the value in capitalizing on the state's natural advantage. As is its recognition that mining is a significant contributor to the economy. All the more confusing then to see its approach to forestry, which is ambivalent too say the least. More important is the need to foster an entrepreneurial spirit. At present we seem to want to stifle it.

Having made these remarks, it would seem that the government is now leaving the economy to fend for itself while it pursues its social reform agenda. While I agree with the sentiments of that agenda, it cannot and should not be at the expense of getting the economy right.

The economy is vitally important in delivering jobs. With unemployment levels the highest in the country, and now with a reported exodus of people from the State, no government can turn its back on the economy.

For example, I would have thought it important that the government would move to support local contractors to ensure money stays in the state as much as it possibly can.

I have not heard of one investor who believes the economy is doing anywhere near OK, or that the investment climate is conducive to investment. Labor needs to recognize that capital is not the enemy of Labor. As former Labor leader Mark Latham has recently emphasized, what's good for capital investment is good for employment.

Apart from the economy as a macro-topic, what are the real issues confronting the State government as it moves into election mode? Without pretending that the following is the entirety of the debate, the following items are worthy of more detailed consideration:

- Stimulating growth, and the provision of infrastructure
- Removing the regulatory obstacles, and resolving local government reform
- Cost of living pressures, involving power prices, and rate increases
- Health, and in particular managing the health budget
- Forestry, and the ongoing land-use conundrum

I intend covering these topics in greater detail over the coming weeks.

In an election environment, with the federal government desperate to shore up support, the State government should make every post a winner. If Federal money is to be handed out, then the State should be clawing for every dollar it can get. Projects as diverse as rail (Abt and Northern Suburbs), arts and recreation funding, support for specific health and disability services, funding of the Tasmanian Brand and a trade office in Asia, support for the Copping C cell, the development of a maritime industry "cluster", are all fair game in this environment. The game is on – let's play!!!

Forestry

The forestry debate is entering an intriguing phase. The Legislative Council has taken evidence and is now writing its report, and a number of submissions have gone forward to the World Heritage Centre questioning the nomination by the Federal Government of a "minor extension" to the existing world heritage area. In either matter, a negative result will have political consequences. And in either matter, a negative result is likely.

Finally, for those who are interested in the carbon and climate change debate, the following video will be of great interest. Some are saying it could be a game-changer.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpTHi7O66pl&feature=player_embedded

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