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“In Support of Progress”

Newsletter

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The State Election

The state of
play

AFL Football

The State Election

WE are now in the last week of the campaign, some of us have already voted, and positive news about policies is giving way to a different sort of news - the fear of the unknown. Dire predictions of a vote against the government, sponsored by the gaming industry, is balanced, to a lesser degree, by those promoting the damage poker machines are doing to the community. A negative balanced by a negative. No question, the vested interests have taken over this campaign, and the government almost appears to be a bit player in the game.

In the minds of voters, health and education are, as they normally are, the big issues, and much has been said about improving the supply chain in these areas – more money, more people, more equipment etc. What is not being talked about is the less sexy side of the equation, the efficiency side. For example, are our people being used to their maximum potential? Are nurses nursing, or are they filling in forms? Are school principals on the case, or are they being swamped with paperwork?

Issues of compliance, using a past century's procedures and systems, have taken over from achievement, and process has taken over from outcomes. Whoever ends up holding the reins of power, this needs to change.

Infrastructure issues have raised their head – suburbs (read housing), roads and transport, and none of these are quick fixes. Thus many promises being made are for a period longer than an election cycle (see #1806).

A lot of money is being thrown around, but no-one is explaining the funding paradigm. The government, for so long reticent to commit to anything approximating “direction”, is now offering big licks of money to all-comers, again without much “direction”. Questions need to be asked:

To what extent are these promises dependent on commonwealth monies being provided?

If the need is so great, why were these actions not taken before?

It would be a sick joke indeed for the winner to say after the election “well, it all depended on the commonwealth coming to the party – and they haven't!”.

The recurring arguments about resource use have been absent from this campaign. Access to public land and public resources once blighted the political landscape. And yet, now: forestry – no significant mention, salmon, a muted response, access to Crown land – a bit of a mumble. Those interested in closing down the store have made a last ditch effort to enliven the debate around “Saving the Tarkine”, but it has come far too late to gain any significant traction, and will not change a vote.

And now we have the Greens saying they will move a vote of no confidence in the Liberals, if in fact the Liberals hold government either in minority or a majority. A rather preemptive and presumptive move, one would have thought.

Many have been the predictions – of a hung parliament or of a majority victory. Such arguments are based on the gross numbers of support for the various political parties, and media outlets are heavily promoting an instant and definitive analysis of the results on the night.

However, I argue caution, because there is a quirk in the way the voting system works. And it is this - who wins the fifth seat? And the answer to that question will come down to preferences, and preferences won't be known on the night.

As you know there are 5 electorates of 5 seats, with an optional preferential voting system, ie a valid vote is one that shows 1 to 5 on the ballot paper. The option is to allow one's vote to lie and die within the one political group. A 1 to 5 for the Libs, or a 1 to 5 for Labor, or a 1 to 5 for the Greens, and no further.

In a close contest, and this election would appear to be so, the battle over the 5th seat in each electorate will be a significant factor in determining who governs after election day.

Two examples make the point:

1. Let's assume four candidates have reached a quota, and there remains three candidates still in the count for the final seat, and each comes from a different political party.

Candidate A has 0.7 of a quota.
Candidate B has 0.6 of a quota.
Candidate C has 0.5 of a quota.

Candidate C is excluded from the vote and those votes are distributed to the other two candidates.

If they all flow to candidate B, then B is the last elected, with a quota. But if they all exhaust, or are distributed more or less evenly, then candidate A will be elected, without a quota.

2. Lets now assume there are three candidates left, from two separate parties, for 2 seats.

Candidate A is from one party, and holds 0.7 of a quota. Candidates B and C are from another party, and together hold 1.55 quotas. From that, a pundit could predict one from each party. But it is not that simple:

Scenario 1

Candidate A has 0.7 of a quota
Candidate B has 0.8 of a quota
Candidate C has 0.75 of a quota

Candidate A is excluded
Candidates B and C are elected

Scenario 2

Candidate A has 0.7 of a quota
Candidate B has 0.9 of a quota
Candidate C has 0.65 of a quota

Candidate C excluded
Candidates A and B win

So it not only depends on the total number of votes a party gets, but the distribution of those votes amongst the individual candidates, which will determine the final outcome. It only takes a small number of votes, in the example above .05 of a quota, or approximately 500 votes, to swing the result and determine who ends up elected. And in this election, to determine which government is elected.

Football

I find it extraordinary that the sceptre of AFL football has again raised its head, in the middle of an election campaign, and that it gets the coverage it does.

No matter how many times past "legends of the game" keep getting trotted out to say what a wonderful thing state-wide football is, the raw facts of the matter are that football is on the decline (see #1805).

Three teams have now left the state-wide competition, being Burnie, Devonport and a Launceston team that actually lost the club itself. The clubs that remain in the competition are struggling financially, and part of the reason is that expenses are up and the gate is down. There is a declining interest in TSL football, and before anyone gets too excited about me making such comment, let me ask this question "WHY IS IT SO?"

In essence, the administration is out of touch with its audience. The AFL is all about promoting talent at the highest level. It pays, at best, lip service to the idea of community engagement. It does not recognise, does not support, and is disconnected from the role of clubs in fostering a club spirit or a broader community involvement. Other codes are dominating the scene because they have a real interest in people being engaged in the sport. With the AFL, if you are not good enough to get into an AFL team, then you are of no value to them. As for the clubs themselves – a waste of time.

Until such time as the AFL changes its focus, football will languish. The current model is wrong. I say again, running a state-wide competition is absurd. The travel is too much, the interest is too low, the money is not there. It would be far better to revert to and properly support three regional competitions, where interest can be regenerated.

Even more so, the idea of having a Tasmanian team in the AFL is absurd. The team would need to be club-based. There is no AFL team that is not club-based. The cost of running such a club in Tasmania is prohibitive, and the number of games it would play "at home" is no greater than what is presently being played in the state by North Melbourne and Hawthorn.

The club would need to be an existing club, or have to start from scratch. Either way, the task would be immense. Let's say the base is Launceston, which is the most central spot. Which club would you choose to be the Tasmanian club? Who would be the sponsors, and what dollars would be involved? Government to pay for it – forget it. Why should it? It has more pressing commitments.

Essentially, it would drain support from the existing competitions, and there would be a risk that the existing premium clubs would die. Sponsorship would dry up. In the end, just one premium club, itself scratching to survive.

Whatever the passion and the emotion surrounding these issues may be, and no matter what pressure is brought to bear on the AFL hierarchy, the reality is that it won't happen. The base is too small, too divided.

All of which might excite football tragics, but leaves non-followers of the game non-plussed and disinterested. So much wasted energy.

Enough!!!

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