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 It is time for voters to be given greater insight into who is donating to the state's political campaigns, says Rebecca White.

OPINION

Talking Point: Transparent campaign funding boosts faith in governments

REBECCA WHITE, Mercury

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WHEN Tasmanians cast their votes in state elections, they can be confident they are playing the most central and important role in an electoral system that is perhaps more robust than any other state.

But a vigorous political system also demands full-bodied transparency.



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campaigns.

And that needs to change.

A critical part of any democracy is a robust and fair electoral system but at the same time, that system needs to be transparent if it is to truly earn the community's confidence.

It is time for voters to be given greater insight into who is donating to the state's political campaigns. Without that appropriate transparency, undisclosed donations to political parties can lead to a perceived conflict of interest among the wider community, undermining the community's trust in our democratic system.

That's why a future majority Labor government will work towards introducing increased clarity in the disclosure of political donations in Tasmania with a raft of initiatives aimed at improved transparency.

On November 1, Labor released its comprehensive Transparency in Political Donations policy and moved in the Parliament to implement an expenditure cap for political parties and candidates, reduce the disclosure threshold and introduce faster donation disclosures.

The Hodgman Liberal Government used its numbers on the floor of the House of Assembly to immediately vote down Tasmanians' right to know in a shortsighted and typically knee-jerk reaction to the need for greater openness.

The Liberals, who just four years ago went to voters promising openness and transparency in government, have, yet again, proven they intend to be anything but.

Tasmania's requirement for once-a-year disclosures is being left behind by developments in other states, many of which are in the process of, or have, introduced real-time disclosure via the internet so voters can see who is donating to parties as donations are made.

Additionally, the vast majority of payments made to Tasmanian political parties — up to 90 per cent in fact — are never made public because they are less than the \$13,000 threshold for reporting.

Labor's commitment is to establish an expenditure cap on political parties and candidates and increase transparency with a raft of initiatives in the disclosure of



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Third parties who want to participate in the election process would be subject to a cap of \$100,000 and would be required to be registered with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission and comply with electoral disclosure laws for any donations towards the campaign.

Greater transparency in relation to the actual identities of donors would be achieved by lowering the current threshold for political donations from \$13,500 between \$1000 and \$2000.

That would prohibit anonymous donations to individuals and parties over the disclosure threshold level.

Political donations to all parties, candidates and elected members seeking re-election would, by law, need to be disclosed to the Tasmanian Electoral Commission within 14 days of their receipt.

And following election day, a special receipt and expenditure return from political parties and candidates would need to be lodged with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission within 60 days.

Foreign donations and donations from tobacco companies to individual candidates, parties or third parties would be banned.

A future majority Labor government will be committed to the type of absolute openness and transparency that the Liberals have talked big, but failed to deliver.

Tasmanians deserve nothing less.

Rebecca White is Tasmania's Labor Leader.



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