

JCF *Come Clean* news from Maxine McKew and Colleen Lewis.

Maxine writes:

JCF supporters will recall our advocacy prior to this year's federal election in calling for comprehensive reform of Australia's campaign finance laws. The publication of the research paper *Come Clean* authored by Monash University Adjunct Professor Colleen Lewis was widely quoted in the press and was discussed at two well-attended forums in Sydney and Melbourne.

It has been encouraging to see that this is now very much a mainstream issue with significant editorial and general media commentary at this time.

With the shape of the new government now clear we are continuing to press the case. In the past fortnight we had a half hour meeting with Cabinet Secretary Arthur Sinodinos and presented him with a copy of Colleen's research paper.

We had a worthwhile discussion and pressed the point that with momentum across the parties for a change in the current arrangements, it was important for the Government to take the initiative and ensure that a blueprint for change is presented to the parliament as soon as possible.

During our meeting we discussed all the possible options (and challenges) including disclosure, caps on donations, third parties, and constitutional barriers. It was encouraging to hear the following points from Senator Sinodinos:

- that he continues to support change in line with his public statements. He cited growing public concern about this issue as something that is front of mind for Canberra
- there is growing pressure for different funding laws to be in place come the next election
- agreed that a first step is to bring in real time disclosure
- expressed his confidence in the new chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Senator Linda Reynolds and her desire to have recommendations ready by early next year

- said on several occasions that continued public advocacy on this issue was important, as it would “help hold the politicians’ feet to the fire.”
- suggested that we meet with Senator Linda Reynolds

All in all, an encouraging start.

Colleen writes:

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) has a new chair, its sixth in approximately 14 months. Such an important committee needs stability, so it was encouraging to hear Senator Sinodinos say he expected Senator Reynolds would continue in her role as chair for the remainder of the 45th Parliament.

The Terms of Reference referred to by Senator Sinodinos were recently published and it is incumbent on all of the JSCEM’s ten-member committee (4 Liberal, 4 Labor, 1 Green, 1 National) to place the public interest well before party and personal interests when putting forward their recommendations to reform Australia’s political donations regime.

It is crucial that the recommendations made by the current JSCEM do not suffer the same fate as those put forward in the JSCEM's 268-page report published in 2011. The return on investment to Australian taxpayers for that report was zero. Not one recommendation has been implemented. The electorate will not tolerate a similar outcome.

Reforming political donations is an idea whose time has come. It is action not more words that is required. All members of the committee shoulder the responsibility to work together and in so doing to resist the vested interest urge that results in the public interest being relegated to an unwinnable position.

We will follow the outcome of the JSCEM's deliberations with great interest and are hopeful that this time the government, opposition, minor parties and independents will come together to ensure that Australia does not continue to operate under a political donations regime that leans too far towards the lowest common denominator end of the political donations model continuum.