

TASMANIAN HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY HANSARD

Parliament – Political Donations

5 April 2011

[11.00 a.m.]

Mr O'HALLORAN (Question) - My question is to the Attorney-General. You have previously announced intentions to introduce social and democratic reforms. In regard to the particular matter of parliamentary reform, you would recall that the three leaders' agreement for parliamentary reform also canvassed potential State-based political donations reforms. Are you aware that other States have moved to limit the source of political donations, specifically from tobacco and gaming companies? Given your previous reform commitment, are you prepared to investigate the implementation of a similar Tasmanian ban on the receipt of political donations from tobacco and gaming interests and, if not, why not?

Mr BARTLETT - I thank the member for his question. I can confirm to the House, as I have said in here before, that before the next election is due I intend to introduce into Tasmania State-based donation disclosure laws. My intention is also to look seriously at expenditure caps for both political parties and candidates. I do so because I believe, as I have always believed, that as part of the 10-point plan of strengthening trust in democracy while Kevin Rudd was looking at moving on national disclosure laws that we should wait for those. It appears that it is delayed significantly, therefore we should get on with our own. I intend to release a discussion paper in coming weeks that will ask a lot of questions because I know there will be a lot of parties, both political and third parties, interested in providing answers at where caps should be set -

Mr Hidding - A lot of Tasmanians.

Mr BARTLETT - Of course - what the disclosure limits should be, what the frequency of disclosure should be et cetera and I will genuinely not be putting stakes in the ground on any of those things until that consultation has been completed. While the Labor Party has made a decision, for example, not to accept donations from tobacco companies - and I support that decision - there is a challenge and a question, I think, and a question that needs to be understood and answered and well-consulted, that if a business activity is legal, if a way of making a profit is legal, would it not then be down to an ethical decision on party politics to make a decision about whether to accept that? Therefore, where is the line drawn as to what is ethically right? The Greens may have a view about gambling or tobacco or the Liberals may have a view about alcohol or we may have a view about tobacco, but it is a very difficult arbitrary line to draw and therefore the only non-arbitrary line in this debate is what is legal. If it is legal to run a business to make a profit, why would it not be just as legal for someone who makes a profit out of selling McDonald's burgers as tobacco to make a donation in a democracy? These are the questions that need to be weighed up, so I am not putting stakes in the ground. There will be a set of questions in the discussion paper to be released that goes to the heart of these sorts of questions and no doubt it will be something for further debate in this House.

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