

Youth Election Forum

24 February 2010

Summary

The Youth Network of Tasmania and Tasmanian Youth Forum, together with TASCROSS' Our Island Our Voices, held their first election forum on Wednesday 24 February 2010 at Parliament House, Hobart.

The event was held to give young Tasmanians the opportunity to have their voices heard on issues that are important to them.

The event was open to young people between 12-25 years, with 93 young people from across the state in attendance on the day.

The interest in this event from young Tasmanians shows that they are passionate about having their voices heard and learning about how they can have an impact in the decision making in their community.

Labor's Lisa Singh MP, Tasmanian Liberal's Vanessa Goodwin MLC and Tasmanian Green's Nick McKim MP participated in the forum.

Ben Waterworth, 21, facilitated the event and put the questions to the politicians.

All young Tasmanians were invited to submit questions to the politicians before the event, and 22 questions were selected to be asked on the day. These questions covered many diverse issues including education, safety, transport, global warming, physical and sexual education, youth leadership and development and support of young people with higher needs.

Each politician was given the opportunity to answer every question, and were each given the chance to answer first. Answers were limited to between 30 seconds and two minutes each.

Questions

This report is taken from extended notes recorded at the Youth Election Forum on Wednesday, 24 February 2010. Quotations are italicised and actual proposed policy initiatives are highlighted in bold.

- 1. In 2009, a survey of 2500 young Tasmanians identified their top three areas of concern as physical and sexual abuse, suicide, and drugs. How would your government deal with these concerns?***

Labor: The statistics show an awful case of affairs. However, despite the problem being a serious one, it is important to remember that between 30 June 2008 and 2009, the rate of physical and sexual abuse cases

decreased by 30% and the number of unallocated cases dropped 64%. As early intervention is a key priority of a Labor government, the focus should be on supporting carers.

Greens: The Greens proposed a Commission of Inquiry in the House, which is the State equivalent of a Royal Commission, and it was voted down by the other parties. Motions such as these are an attempt by the Greens to fix the problem. Education leads to tolerance of individuals in dire situations. The early intervention which Labor speaks of should be targeted at a holistic approach in schools, and a program directed at parents, to prevent problems absolutely.

Liberal: There is much work to be done. The problem is the progression from discovery to prosecution; the laws exist but they are not adequately enforced. The Liberals support early intervention into the causes of the problems – *“We’re putting a fence at the top of the cliff, not an ambulance at the bottom”*. Programs such as the Chance on Main initiatives should be revitalized to help individuals in need.

- 2. According to Mission Australia’s study in 2009, almost 40% of young people value their physical and mental health, second only to family and friends, and yet relationship and sexual education programs are not consistently provided through schools. What is your understanding of these issues and what is your party’s policy in this area?**

Labor: Education is about relationships. Labor offers support to schools while providing them with the autonomy to make decisions on what sexual education to provide. By supporting Parents and Friends school associations and similar groups, the will of the community is exhibited in schools curriculum.

Greens: What the Labor answer means is that they do not mandate any sexual or relationship education in schools. The Greens policy is to mandate such programs in all public schools and even expand this mandate to private institutions. Reform in the private system can be achieved by tying government funding to the provision of these classes. In addition to sexual education, to help with physical wellbeing, the Greens would **implement driver education into compulsory curriculum** to protect against a rising youth road toll.

Liberal: The Liberals have a broad approach focused on bringing in all relevant stakeholders, and there is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

- 3. Within the Australian culture, drinking is widely accepted. Do you think that the debate about raising the legal drinking age to 21 will make people question their views on responsible drinking?**

Labor: I’m not personally in favour of raising the drinking age. Having the debate may help to raise awareness of the issues which surround the problem, however.

Greens: I’m also against raising the drinking age. *“If a person is old enough to join the army and die for the country they should be able to have a few beers.”* The problem is most effectively tackled with targeted schools programs and not through blanket advertising on television.

Liberal: Agrees with Labor and Greens, but it is important to remember that the problem is not limited to young people. So while education is certainly effective for dealing with one demographic, it is not the panacea for all drinking related problems.

4. Tasmania has the highest rate of smoking amongst young people in Australia. Given the adverse health effects of smoking, what is your party's policy about this issue?

Greens: The two most prominent causes of death and disease are alcohol and tobacco. The problem of taking up smoking as a young person affects the whole of society but is particularly prevalent amongst young women. The key is enforcing restrictions which exist in legislation. *"The law is there but it is not being enforced"*. If law was enforced at the infringement end, it would take the pressure off the health system.

Liberal: The banning of smoking in public places was good legislation. There are many other disincentives the government could place on smoking such as higher taxation. All these measures will be ineffective while the consequences of harms are underrated.

Labor: Labor was the first state to ban smoking in public places which was good policy, now leading the way for other states to follow. Tasmania has given **\$2.7 million in the 2008/09 budget to antismoking measures**, with a **further \$200,000 to marketing solutions** to the problem. Labor supports programs such as 'Quit Tasmania' and the Smoking Cessation Program which is a government initiative.

5. Many young Tasmanians struggle to reach the requirements necessary to get their driver's license. The alternative is to rely on public transport, family and friends. What do you see as the solution to these issues?

Greens: The solution is as simple as **free public transport for all students**. The policy will be released by the Greens tomorrow (Thursday, 25 February 2010) to make free buses for all students, all the time, the official strategy of the Tasmanian Greens. This will not only fix the transport issue, but reduce climate change, increase road safety, and many other advantageous consequences.

Liberal: Similar policy to the Greens, but limited to primary, secondary students and college students on school days only. Liberal policy also **encourages volunteer mentors to assist with driving practice** to take the pressure off parents and friends of learner drivers.

Labor: Support should be given to small projects on a local level. Several Labor MPs took the 'Bus It Challenge' and schemes like the same. If re-elected, Labor will also **investigate the plausibility of light rail to the northern suburbs** by utilising existing infrastructure. Bolstering bus services only goes so far and 'park and ride' arrangements should be made wherever possible.

6. Many young Tasmanians originate from different cultures, refugee backgrounds, and/or speak languages other than English at home. In light of this, how will your government support a more multicultural and socially inclusive Tasmania?

Liberal: Our party proposes a respectful relationship program, where we can work to unify community groups so that all forms of culture are accepted. Forums for the issue of multiculturalism are important to get all identities talking in the same location.

Labor: I have a personal multicultural background so have a great deal of interest in multicultural issues. I believe that relishing difference in the community and supporting groups which help promote tolerance. The Migrant Resource Centre and Anglicare are examples of successful programs working to achieve these aims. Attending Citizenship Ceremonies is also a showcase of the diversity in society.

Greens: Largely agree with Labor. The Greens proposed, and are prepared to **fund, a centre in Glenorchy which would act as a central hub for all new arrivals information**. All services would be available including housing services, job application support, education options, and classes in written/spoken English. Additionally, the Greens would bring Tasmania in line with other States and **introduce a law criminalizing racial vilification**.

7. Young people are often portrayed in the media as being irresponsible; particularly in relation to drugs, alcohol and driving. Do you think that this is a fair view and how will your government aim to improve intergenerational relations?

Liberal: The Liberals support programs such as Common Ground. An increase in intergenerational forays will help to bridge the gap and create tolerance. Young people are future politicians and leaders and no one should generalise about their demographic.

Labor: The portrayal is not a fair one. It is important to remember that elderly people are also portrayed in a negative way. Discrimination is present in many social groups. Personally, being the mother of two children both highlights the differences and helps to understand the changing cultures. Acceptance comes from meetings and exposure to the different facets of the community.

Greens: "Stereotyping of any group is lazy". In order to ignore the false portrayal, government must get on the front foot. The Greens policy of **lowering the voting age to 16** is a sign of confidence government has in young people's responsibility. The actual policy would make the system a voluntary enrolment at 16, but if a young person joined the roll, they would be legally obligated to vote as if they were an adult.

8. As young people, we often feel that we have minimal impact on the decision making processes of government. How do you believe that young people can have a greater say in what happens in their community?

Liberal: As citizens, young people have a right to provide information and complain about their government. Youth Parliament is a great opportunity to hear the views of young people, as are youth advisory committees. Any involvement on a local level is more likely to have an impact.

Labor: Young people bring an innovative thinking style to processes in which older people tend to remain conservative. One Labor policy to raise the profile of youth decision making is to **create a state-wide SRC peak body**, similar to the state Parents and Friends organisation.

Greens: Lowering the voting age as mentioned above will help to enfranchise young people. The key is to get groups together which represent large numbers of individuals. Combining groups and forming committees raises the importance of a single message to the process of governance.

9. How will you report progress on issues raised at the youth parliament with young Tasmanians?

Labor: The Premier of Tasmania has responded to the collection of Bills presented to the government. Youth Parliament is a great opportunity for the organisers and the participants to demonstrate leadership skills.

Greens: The Greens love Youth Parliament. Personally, I've sat in on many sessions. The Greens are prepared to respond individually to any issue, or in any other way that is appropriate.

Liberal: It is important that an official response is tabled in Parliament and debated by parliamentarians.

10. TYF provides a multitude of opportunities for young people in Tasmania such as promoting and nurturing leadership, and self development. What intentions does your party have in regards to youth leadership, coming into the election?

Labor: TYF is a great platform for leadership and Labor would offer continued support. There are also many other effective programs and organisations such as the Tasmanian Youth Government Association (TYGA), and the United Nations Youth Association (UNYA). These other groups foster leadership and provide a framework for leadership to be developed.

Greens: The strength of an organisation or forum is linked to the financial encouragement by government. If the money is there to support the groups' desired activities, the aims can be met. It is also important for politicians to show up in person to events and activities, and be accessible while present.

Liberal: Agree with the other parties.

11. In recent research by Anglicare, it was found that many young people in Tasmania are emergency relief clients. What action do you propose can be taken to alleviate the poverty, homelessness and housing affordability issues faced by Tasmanian young people?

Labor: Youth homelessness is a serious issue. Often the root causes stem from abuse and neglect. Labor supports the Accommodation Assistance policy as well as the **'Safe at Home' laws**. It is also important to combat the more insidious causes of homelessness and there is no simple solution.

Greens: The Greens have a twofold approach to dealing with the issue. (1) Early intervention is most effective through educating parents and young people, targeted at both prevention and also respect for individuals in dire situations. There is, however, an inevitable level of homelessness and the Greens would focus on (2) improving the social safety net. Make the system larger and better funded by “*building fewer stadiums and buying fewer football teams*”.

Liberal: Affordability can be improved by the Liberal plan to reduce and eventually **abolish the Land Tax**. An increase in youth housing models should result from the development opportunities. There are also initiatives such as lowering the cost of food, and **microcredit loan options** so all people can afford housing. All such schemes are covered by the Liberal Fairer Tasmania Policy.

12. At the TYF Climate Change Forum last year, caring for the environment and climate change were recognised as critical areas of concern for Tasmanian young people. What initiatives would your government introduce in response to these concerns and how would they aim to involve young people?

Labor: Climate Change is one of the biggest issues facing the globe. Personally, all people should aim to leave the planet in a better condition than they found it, or at least prevent the decline. There are many options for reducing emissions.

Greens: Greens have many solutions including: **Stopping all burning and destruction of forests**. Making **public transport free or as accessible as possible**. Both of which drastically reduce carbon emissions. Another solutions is to invest in **over 10,000 solar panels for private residences**.

Liberal: The **pesticides and monitoring provisions need an overhaul** to bring them up to date. There will also be an attempt to **rid Tasmania of all plastic shopping bags**.

13. Education is vital in the Knowledge Economy in the 21st Century. How do you feel Tasmania’s rates of retention in schools will affect our economic and social future?

Greens: The Knowledge Economy grows the actual economy, leading to improvements of individuals and society at large. Intervention in early years results in a tenfold return. The same group of students have been an experiment by the government, experiencing ELs and then the Tasmania Tomorrow education reforms. “The government is fiddling with the wrong end.” Education change should occur in the earliest years of schooling.

Liberal: Qualifications are important with 86% of jobs requiring a college level TQA qualification. Liberals would pledge **\$30 million to invest in high school reform**, and completely **overhaul the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms** which have failed.

Labor: There is certainly a need to raise the retention rates which are the lowest in the country. Tasmania Tomorrow aimed to fix a system which was working for most people before, but not working for everyone. While there is still some distance to go, with the help of teachers and parents, the reforms can succeed. Labor aims to fix the system for everyone, not just most.

14. In recent years, there has been much upheaval in Tasmania's education system. How would your government aim to provide students with a stable and well rounded education system?

Greens: Students should not be subjected to an experiment. "The same group of students have reform fatigue, teachers as well." The Greens education system would be implemented derived from an evidence based program which Tasmania Tomorrow was not. Consultation should take place with all stakeholders before a system is implemented.

Liberal: A Liberal Government would **abolish the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms**, as the changes divided the community. We agree that all stakeholders should be brought in before implementing a system. Consultation leads to a strong culture of participation.

Labor: No change is easy and no system is perfect. The old system made students choose between a university career and a TAFE course. This limited access to technical classes and opportunities. It's important to change to look after all students.

15. The Australian Government's State of Australia's Young People report of 2009 notes that many young people combine casual or part time work with study. How would your government protect vulnerable young people from exploitation by their employers, as well as enable young Tasmanians to have a healthy balance between work and study?

Greens: It's important to know that a lot of the protections are a federal responsibility. The federal ALP promised to roll back Work Choices but did not. Cheap or free transport helps lower the incidental costs of a job. The broadband rollout will also increase information and access to job opportunities.

Liberal: The Commonwealth Fair Work Act was a positive move and enhanced protections. The key is building the confidence to resist exploitation. This can be improved through education and information about the negotiation process.

Labor: There was an attempt to roll back Work Choices. When employees are placed on federal Award Agreements, they are protected by minimum standards.

16. Many young Tasmanians feel that there is a lack of educational and career opportunities within the State, and so leave for perceived opportunities interstate and overseas. How would your government encourage people to achieve their potential within the State, particularly in light of Tasmania's ageing population?

Liberal: There needs to be some research into why young people are leaving. The Liberals would attempt to 'sell' Tasmania to the rest of the world, promoting our unique assets. Developing the waterfront and other similar tourist infrastructure would attract visitors and retain citizens.

Labor: We shouldn't forget that Tasmania has the lowest unemployment rates in the country. The Premier has **pledged to create 15,000 new jobs over the next four years**. These are bold job targets but Labor believes they are achievable. The new broadband network will remove the feeling of isolation and allow for greater development in Tasmania.

Greens: I disagree with this premise to some extent. Personally, everyone should leave the State and explore new and different cultures. The policy should be to encourage all Tasmanians to return to the State, bringing back all their experiences and knowledge. This can be aided by protecting our natural assets as they are unique to Tasmania.

17. In isolated regions, such as some communities on the West Coast, Central Highlands, and Southern Midlands, there are limited social services and recreational opportunities for young people. What initiatives and ideas do you propose to alleviate the disadvantage of living in non-urban environments?

Liberal: There are several activities which the Liberals support. Travelling performing arts shows can bring entertainment to communities or, failing that, ensuring access to public transport and infrastructure to open up more entertainment options. Liberals strongly invest in skate parks at locations such as Seven Mile Beach and Bruny Island. Groups such as the PCYC help to keep young people engaged.

Labor: We believe that access is created by public transport and internet access. The Government's social inclusion strategy developed by the new dedicated department helps develop sport and recreation opportunities. Additionally, groups such as the Foundation for Young Australians create connections between young people and communities.

Greens: Facilities are vital in regional areas. Public transport removes the tyranny of distance which isolates rural communities. Technology and facilities combine to create many possibilities for young people.

18. How will your government aim to improve and expand the opportunities and services available to young people with disabilities?

Liberal: Liberals will invest in a **state funded Community Equipment Scheme**. This creates independence for people with mobility issues. A Liberal Government will also have a **separate Health portfolio** to deal with disability issues.

Labor: Labor supports Child and Family centres. Groups such as St. Giles, when combined with newly **initiated Gateway services**, help disabled Tasmanians.

Greens: **All public sector buildings would have compulsory disabled access** and public Transport should be similarly accessible. **All Metro buses should have wheelchair ramps and seating**. Government is responsible for service provision and is failing at their role if disabled people are unable to access services.

19. Many young people face the additional challenge of acting as a young carer to a loved one. How will your government seek to support them?

Labor: Help in this area is mainly a federal issue administered through Centrelink.

Greens: This issue is an enormous burden and is largely underestimated or misunderstood. A lot is said of grandparents caring for grandchildren but little is said of the reverse. **Investment in state supported living facilities is essential.** Also direct payment to supporters can help young people to manage their situation.

Liberal: There are several options. ‘Carers Tas’ is a short term solution for helping young people. Centrelink can improve its services by having a highly interactive website with clear information. The Liberals would also support **a place on school enrolment forms/details for a comment about carer situation.** Schools can then help by making allowances for late attendance or additional emotional support services.

20. A young person in care can expect to move homes once every year for each year they are in care, leading to further instability in their lives. What is your party policy for addressing this issue?

Labor: There are several measures which can be taken to improve the situation for young people. Projects such as the ‘Be Heard Program’ can help with self esteem building. **Supporting legislative amendments which enable permanent guardianship** is proactive policy. Making trauma services available is an essential accompaniment to any legislative change.

Greens: Both houses of parliament voted for the Labor legislative changes so the Greens contributed to those positive changes. The best thing for stability is to ensure that carers are good at their jobs. We believe that tight scrutiny for workers coupled with support leads to the best care for young people.

Liberal: The Fairer Tas policy supports stability for young people, including therapeutic support for children in care. *“The State must be an exemplary parent”* when the state has taken on that role.

Supplementary Questions

An additional five questions were taken on the day from young people present at the forum. These included questions on duck hunting, youth development officers and the possibility of a Tasmania theme park.

21. What is your policy on Youth Officers in Local Government?

Greens: Service is best at a local level, and the most effective partnerships are created. The State government should help financially to enable local government to afford youth officers.

Liberal: All councils should have youth officers funded on a merit basis.

Labor: Youth officers have been highly successful, the proof being in the activities of groups such as the Hobart City Council Youth Advisory Committee and Glenorchy Youth Task Force. There is a critical mass for Youth Taskforce numbers but officers are always needed.

22. What do you think of creating a Gold Coast style theme park in Tasmania?

ALL: It is important that Tasmania does not become mediocre in order to appeal to the same group as that which attends theme parks. Forests are better than Disneyworld, and protecting Tasmania's natural environment gives Tasmania a unique attractive quality.

23. What is your party's policy on banning duck hunting in Tasmania?

Greens: The Greens have a very clear policy to ban, absolutely, duck hunting in Tasmania. *"It is not okay to shoot and kill a duck for fun."*

Liberal: Personally, not sure of policy, but can research and inform the TYF.

Labor: Personally, do not support duck hunting.

24. Given that students in the public system can enrol in Year 13, and home school students are unable to be recognised for the comparable level of study, are you aware of this and do you believe it is discriminatory?

Labor/Liberal: Unaware of the situation.

Greens: Personally, was not aware, but it is certainly discriminatory.

25. Will you form an accord in the event of a Hung Parliament?

Labor: No.

Liberal: No.

Greens: The best government is the result of a public negotiation of an accord. It leads to stability and activity. Liberal and Labor, by refusing to even consider an accord, are refusing to deliver good results for the voters, and not respecting their democratic right to create the parliament of their choosing.

26. SPECIFICALLY FOR MR MCKIM: Will we ever see a Green Premier in Tasmania?

Greens: Personally, believe that people's priorities are shifting and, when the issues are examined, Tasmania will see a Green Premier soon.

27. Concluding Policy: What three actions will your government do in the first twelve months on the issues affecting Tasmanian youth?

Labor: (1) – Listen to YNOT as the peak body for young people to provide key advice to government. Taskforces and advisory groups can submit budget submissions with recommendations, and read reports such as the Youth Parliament report. (2) – Engage with young people on all media such as Edge Radio and other youth run publications. (3) – Have an open door policy for young people to personally discuss policy.



Greens: Three concrete, actionable, and quantifiable policies. (1) – Lower the voting age to 16 as mentioned above. This will instill leadership and enfranchisement to young people. (2) – Free public transport for all students to help with engagement, access to services, and entertainment. (3) – Increase investment in early years education to improve the prospects for graduates and clarify the qualifications system.

Liberal: (1) – End the Tasmania Tomorrow experiment. (2) – Work towards improving the Tasmania ‘brand’ through social networking media. (3) – Free buses for primary and secondary students on school days only.

This report was compiled by the Youth Network of Tasmania, from notes taken by Tasmanian Youth Forum members.