



***Quid pro quo* needed for Western  
Australian electoral funding**

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The views expressed are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Democratic Audit of Australia.

When one vote one value was being introduced in Western Australia (WA), I wrote to WA MLCs Alan Cadby and Giz Watson saying that Labor wanted it so badly that they had a unique opportunity to extract major accountability and electoral reform as part of the package. The opportunity was missed and no *quid pro quo* was demanded.

Now with the proposal to introduce public funding for political parties contesting state elections the opportunity must not be missed a second time.

In return for public funding of WA election campaigns a *quid pro quo* should be exacted.

The Australian Democrats have long believed that political parties and individuals contesting elections should receive public funding. Some strongly disagree.

What all should agree on is that the receipt of public funds in return requires better political governance, higher political standards, accountability, and full transparency.

Many of the world's democracies now have some form of public funding for political parties. In Australia it was first introduced in NSW in 1981. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was amended in 1984 to provide the same for federal elections. Public funding of elections is also in Queensland, Victoria and the ACT.

One argument for public funding is that it helps reduce the dangerous influence and control of political parties exerted by big individual, corporate, and union donors.

Large donations from these sources continue to grow exponentially. That is the rub of course – there is no indication that the majors will reform the current donations system. If that is so, and public funding of political parties in WA is a done deal, then lets at least make political parties properly accountable.

The minimum *quid pro quo* that the public must demand must be that political parties produce an annual report that fully details their financial statements, the sources of their income and what it is spent on.

Political parties should at least be subject to the public accountability regime that applies to listed corporations and unions. At present they have less transparency than a local sports club.

Such reporting occurs in the UK and should do so here too. It was recently disclosed that Cherie Blair had billed her husband's Labor party nearly £8000 for hairstyling during last year's general election. This sort of revelation reassures the public that nothing, even the most petty detail, is being withheld.

Political governance should be a reform priority. At the least this should include party constitutional requirements similar to the Corporations Law standards for the constitutions of companies; one-vote, one value in internal party affairs; and control of a party being vested in its members.

These reforms would oblige political parties to meet minimum standards of accountability and internal democracy and would go some way to addressing the

scourge of branch-stacking and pre-selection abuse that is widely reported to occur in many political parties.

Given the immense power of some political parties and their vital role in our government and democracy, it is right and proper to insist that certain standards be met. This argument is even more compelling when taxpayers' dollars are being used to fund election campaigns.

Further reforms must be demanded to WA funding and disclosure laws, including that professional fund raising be subject to the same disclosure rules applying to donations; that political parties must disclose who lies behind hidden money donated to trusts, foundations or clubs or return the money; that donations or loans from foreign overseas individuals, or overseas entities be banned; and that donations with strings attached be prohibited.

One vote one value reform was introduced in WA without any *quid pro quo* being demanded. The same mistake must not be made twice.