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CORRECTIONS

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

defence subcommittee went to New Zealand, given the changes that are happening in the world around us.

At the outset, I thank our New Zealand hosts for the way in which they assisted us. Their most senior people—the Chief of the Defence Force and the secretary of their defence department—were willing to give significant amounts of their time, the best part of half to three-quarters of a day, to ensure that we were fully and properly briefed on all of the issues that were of interest to us. It is an indication of not just the closeness of the ties between our two nations and our two defence establishments but the importance which we and the New Zealanders place on the relationship.

At the outset, I place on record my thanks to Stephen Boyd from the secretariat; to Max Simmons, who was an excellent emissary of the New Zealand government and looked after us remarkably well; to their defence minister, Mark Burton, along with other senior officials who gave of their time; and to my colleagues. It was a good delegation to participate in.

The New Zealand government in recent years have been forced to make some difficult decisions about the broad structure of their three services. We have seen in recent times their decision to end what amounts to their attack air wing and to maintain, effectively, aircraft only for transport and reconnaissance purposes. As you can imagine, that was a very difficult decision for any government to take. But we learnt of the benefits that decision provided, particularly in the rejuvenation of army and in the planning for new acquisitions for a naval fleet that by New Zealand assessments will better suit their future needs and, I am sure, enable us to work closely with them in the years ahead.

It was interesting to see the way in which they have committed to an entire new structure in army, to an entire new mobilised brigade with brand new LAV vehicles, similar to the ASLAVs that we use in our cavalry in the Northern Territory. The New Zealand acquisitions, being more recent, will be a new generation and improved, although there will be significant compatibility between the two. That will provide our New Zealand colleagues with a capacity to integrate both with us and with a range of European and NATO forces should the occasion arise.

The fairly experimental work that the New Zealanders have undertaken with unemployed people has been commented on by my colleagues. It certainly has provided positive outcomes for many of the young people who have been through it. As a person most interested in defence matters, I should say that were we to look at those sorts of activities I would want to be assured that defence dollars were not being syphoned off for the purpose. I have a fairly

dogmatic view that defence dollars are hard to come by at the best of times and they need to be allocated with some strict adherence to the security interests of the nation.

That said, if Defence has an ability to provide this service and others cannot—and it was an impressive display we saw in New Zealand—it may well be that from a whole of government perspective there is a need for Defence to be supplemented to undertake that sort of activity. I commend the recommendations in the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Maranoa wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (1.05 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

Electoral Matters Committee Report

Mr GEORGIU (Kooyong) (1.05 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, I present the committee's report entitled *The 2001 Federal Election: Report of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2001 federal election, and matters related thereto*.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr GEORGIU—It is worth noting that this report on the conduct of the 2001 federal election coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters and its predecessor, the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform. These committees have made an important contribution to free and fair Australian federal elections, by reviewing the conduct of each election since 1983 and making recommendations for improvements to electoral law and practice in Australia. It is worth noting that this is the first unanimous post-election report the committee has produced in 13 years. I thank my colleagues on the committee for their commitment to a consensus approach.

In all, this report contains 34 recommendations for either legislative or procedural changes. The recommendations cover many aspects of elections, including the management of the electoral roll, preparations

for the election, polling, scrutiny, the publication of election results and the regulation of political parties, donations and electoral campaigning. The committee considers that all its recommendations will contribute to ongoing reform of the Electoral Act and election management procedures.

Two of the committee's recommendations in particular would, if implemented, result in quite fundamental reform to electoral procedures. These two recommendations are aimed at strengthening electoral roll integrity. Australia's electoral roll is the bridge between the right to vote and the ability to exercise that right. Australian democracy depends on an electoral roll with high integrity and inclusiveness, that maximises voting by those entitled to do so while minimising the opportunities for manipulation. There have been a limited number of demonstrated manipulations of the electoral roll, but there is no persuasive evidence of any widespread malpractice. However, the committee believes that it is not sufficient to rely on the absence of such evidence alone. The electoral roll must be of the highest integrity and inclusiveness, and it must be publicly demonstrated that this is the case.

One of the keys to electoral roll integrity is ensuring that enrolments are accurate in respect of the identity and address of the enrollee. The AEC and the Electoral Act do have some measures in place to verify this, but the reality is that the proof of identity required to enrol to vote to determine the government of Australia is less than that required to join a video library. Over the past 10 years—in the committee, this House and the Senate—there has been a contentious, protracted and as yet unresolved debate on proof of identity requirements. The committee believes that the time has come to seek to achieve a consensual, constructive resolution of this matter.

The committee has agreed on a streamlined proof of identity requirement that addresses proven cases of manipulation; that sets standards that all people entitled to vote can reasonably meet; that is consistent with proof of identity requirements in other areas of Australian life; and that reassures the public that barriers against roll manipulation have been strengthened. The committee unanimously recommends that all applicants for enrolment and re-enrolment be required to verify their name and address using their driver's licence or other documents accepted by the AEC or, where that is impossible, by providing a confirmation supplied by two people who are on the electoral roll. The committee recommends that these identification requirements be trialled with a three-year sunset clause.

Another significant issue before the committee was concern about provisional voters and their entitlement to vote. A person whose name cannot be

found on the electoral roll may cast a provisional vote. In 2001, nearly 200,000 provisional votes were admitted to the count. This happens after their entitlement to vote is checked by the AEC. However, the AEC submitted that many provisional voters 'are not living at the address they claim as their enrolled address and may not have lived there for some years'. The committee recommends that a person who claims to still be resident within the division of their last enrolment, but whose name does not appear on the certified list of voters, shall only be issued with a provisional vote where they can validate their entitlement by providing proof of their name and address.

The close of rolls period is the period after the issue of writs for an election. It is currently seven days. During these days, people can enrol or change their enrolment details. This has been a controversial issue since 1993. Some perceive that the AEC cannot properly check the validity of enrolments made during this time, and that inappropriate enrolments could influence outcomes in marginal seats. Accordingly, there have been successive proposals to shorten the close of rolls period. The committee examined the AEC's processes for checking enrolment transactions during the close of rolls period. It found that these did not differ from the processes that applied at other times. Where the checking processes indicate anomalies in enrolment applications, such applications are not added to the roll. Given this, the committee concluded that, particularly in light of its recommendations to strengthen proof of identity requirements for enrolment and re-enrolment, the close of rolls period should remain at seven days.

The committee also considered submissions concerning the franchise of particular groups of voters. An Australian moving overseas may register as an eligible overseas elector three months prior to or up to two years after their departure, if they intend to return to Australia within six years. Australians living overseas who are not enrolled to vote may enrol as eligible overseas electors, but only if they are overseas for the purpose of their career or that of their spouse. Submissions objected to the conditions for admission to EOE status, saying that they derogate from the general right to vote. The committee sees no justification for differentiating between Australians overseas on the basis of their reasons for moving overseas, and considers that the time limit for enrolling while overseas should be extended.

Submissions to the committee contended that the Electoral Act restricts the ability of homeless people to enrol to vote in federal elections. Estimates of the proportion of homeless people eligible to vote but not enrolled vary considerably. Estimates for the 2001 federal election range from 29,000 to 80,000. The committee acknowledges the difficulties of homeless

people in relation to enrolment and voting. It notes that the Electoral Act has provisions for itinerant voters—people who have no real place of residence—and these provisions may take in homeless people. The committee recommends that the itinerant elector provisions be amended to elucidate their applicability to homeless persons. The committee also believes that the AEC should continue its efforts to simplify and clarify the itinerant elector application form, and should target homeless persons in its next public awareness campaign.

The committee has made a number of other recommendations, such as recommendations relating to the sale of the electoral roll. It recommends that that should no longer be possible.

The committee believes that the time has come for a focused inquiry into the administration and funding of the AEC. The committee will seek a reference to conduct such an inquiry. Pending this inquiry, the committee has recommended that there be no further co-locations of AEC divisional offices, and that the AEC be provided with funding which ensures a minimum of three full-time electoral staff in each House of Representatives division.

In conclusion, the committee thanks all those who made submissions to this inquiry and appeared at the public hearings. Participation in such inquiries makes an important contribution to the work of the Australian parliament. I extend my thanks to the deputy chair, Mr Michael Danby, to our fellow committee members, and to the committee secretariat—Russell Chafer, Sonia Palmieri and Bronwen Jagers—for their dedication and patience. It is worthwhile noting that Senator Robert Ray, who was on the original electoral reform committee in 1983, is now a member of the committee on its 20th anniversary. I commend the report to the parliament.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (1.15 p.m.)—I commend to the House the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters entitled *The 2001 Federal Election*. It is an example of the major political parties working together sensibly to achieve quite a substantive outcome. The committee's bipartisan recommendations on proof of identity for enrolment resolve many years of disagreement between the government and the opposition on this matter.

The member for Kooyong noted that the government accepted the use of some streamlined identification—I would like to emphasise the word 'streamlined'—in the identification process. The committee's proposal that driver's licences be used as the primary form of identification for enrolment are consistent with the scheme originally proposed by Mr Mark Dreyfus, QC in his report to the ALP on the ALP form of identification in internal voting. It is very pleasing to see that we have now overcome some of

the angst on this issue and moved to a process that all sides can identify with.

The calm way in which the chair of the committee and the secretariat proceeded with these kinds of issues is another reason why this matter has proceeded so smoothly. Prior to the last elections, there was some hysteria about the number of deliberately false enrolments. I remember the statistics given to me by the Electoral Commissioner. He explained that, in the six national votes, including a referendum, prior to the previous election, there had been 72 proven cases of electoral fraud. As there were 12 million votes at each of those six elections, that means that there was one case of proven electoral fraud for every million votes in the previous decade. That is something of a tribute to the clean way the Australian electoral system is conducted. I am pleased that we have gone to an even higher level of verification so that there can be no question by anyone that these high standards are continuing to be adhered to.

The Labor Party has continuously resisted calls made, in the name of the integrity of the electoral roll, for the seven-day close-of-roll period to be eliminated. In the view of the opposition, this would disenfranchise voters and lead to a less accurate roll rather than a roll of greater integrity. The committee has now unanimously agreed to the seven-day close-of-roll period being retained. That neatly balances the streamlined identification process identified by the chair of the committee, the member for Kooyong.

In my view, the retention of the seven-day period after an election is called is particularly important for young people, who often do not get around to enrolling until after an election is called. I was at a local high school recently and took enrolment forms along so that 17-year-olds and 18-year-olds could enrol. I make a practice of doing that wherever I am. The Electoral Commission continues its excellent work, with all federal members of parliament being present at citizenship ceremonies and people enrolled as soon as they become Australian citizens.

About 100,000 people enrolled or changed their enrolments after the election that was called in 2001. This bipartisan recommendation ensures that those 100,000 people can keep their right to vote. It is important for homeless people, who are just as entitled to vote as anyone else, to have their say. The ABS estimates that there are around 100,000 homeless people, yet only 4,200 people are enrolled as itinerant electors. This may mean that a larger number of homeless people are being denied the right to vote. Perhaps that is something that we should look at in the future.

In this report, the committee notes that it awaits a report from the AEC on options for effective delivery of the educational enrolment services to Aboriginal

electors following the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service. The opposition has consistently called for the reinstatement of the Aboriginal electoral information service. We are awaiting with interest a report from the AEC on Aboriginal enrolment and what they can do out of their existing budget.

The committee also recommended changes aimed at ensuring that homeless people are better able to exercise their entitlement to enrol and vote. In the opposition's submission, this was stressed as an important measure.

The committee recorded evidence from the Labor Party and the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission that a group known as the Citizens Electoral Council received a very high proportion of its income from undisclosed sources—\$941,000 out of \$1.1 million. While the CEC was an infinitesimal recorder of votes, this made it one of the highest recipients of donations to a political party in Australia—in fact, coming after the Labor Party and the Liberal Party, higher than the Australian Democrats or the Greens. While the report states that this does not of itself prove that the CEC is in breach of the Electoral Act, the committee's recommendations 32 and 33 double the penalty for accepting anonymous donations and ask the AEC to report back at each federal election on cases of overseas donations.

I echo the remarks of the member for Kooyong on eligible overseas electors. There are 720,000 Australian expatriates. Only some 63,000 recorded votes at overseas posts at the last election. I believe the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has a great deal more work to do to enhance its activities at overseas posts to see that Australians can enrol. I am particularly grateful to my friend, Peter Hansen, the Victorian Agent-General in London for putting me in contact with a number of Australian expatriates who had a great deal of trouble in voting at the previous two elections.

I also note that the committee's report unanimously endorses four-year terms.

The Labor Party made an extensive submission to the inquiry on the use of taxpayer funds to promote the Liberal Party. In our submission we regretted that \$122 million a year was spent on advertising by the federal government, making it the biggest spender in advertising in this country, more than Coca-Cola, Telstra, Coles Myer, McDonald's and Toyota. Even the Auditor-General agreed that this was unacceptable. The Labor Party twice introduced bills, which I support, to curb government advertising—which, in my view, is clearly political. This kind of advertising has continued even in the last couple of weeks, with all students receiving from the Australian Taxation Office a pamphlet advertising the Liberals' policy on

higher education under the motto 'Sustainability, quality, equity and diversity'. In my view this is clearly political advertising, as the legislation this pamphlet promotes to students may not even be passed by the parliament.

The report notes arguments in favour of Australia's compulsory voting system. While the report does not take a position on the issue, it does discuss full participation providing electoral outcomes with greater legitimacy because there is a higher voter turnout and parliaments are elected according to the wishes of all Australian citizens. In my view, voting is a civic duty and the significance of national elections should not be undermined by apathy, as it appears to be in some other countries. I remind this House that people can choose not to vote. They are merely asked to attend a polling booth and return a ballot paper to the ballot box; they do not have to vote for any political party. What is required of Australian citizens is just attendance and some minimal attention to the democratic process that runs this country.

A number of studies have found that Australians are familiar with the mechanics of voting and have a fair understanding of the Australian political system—the 1994 report of the Civics Experts Group, for instance. This weighs against the argument that the participation of those who are indifferent to, or uninterested in, political processes diminishes the significance of the vote. Contrary to the argument that compulsory voting encourages complacency in safe seats, political parties assert that they value their safe electorates, and the political activism of electors in safe seats is demonstrated through good participation in party membership, branch activities, party forums, election campaigning et cetera. Indeed, many of us would know from experience that it would not be possible to campaign in some of the more remote or marginal seats if it were not for the political participation of people in safe seats.

Regarding the prominence of major party advertising, it can be argued that compulsory voting may reduce the role of money in elections as parties and candidates do not need to convince people to turn out to vote. Finally, a national survey carried out immediately after polling day for the 1996 federal election found that 74 per cent of respondents supported compulsory voting at federal elections. Just last Friday I saw Gary House and Pauline Barron from my local FEC at a local school; the Electoral Commission continues to perform an excellent role, as did the secretariat of this committee. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Does the member for Kooyong wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr GEORGIU (Kooyong) (1.25 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have the right to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

COMMITTEES

Science and Innovation Committee

Report

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro) (1.25 p.m.)—On behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation, I present the committee's report entitled *Riding the innovation wave: the case for increasing business investment in R&D*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr NAIRN—Our Australian character is underscored by a pioneering and innovative spirit. Our unique history and geography combine to make it so. It is therefore not surprising that, as a nation, we have developed a strong and deserved reputation for hatching great ideas. I am delighted to present on behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation the very first report by this new committee, which inquired into business commitment to research and development in Australia. It is a unanimous report.

Riding the innovation wave: the case for increasing business investment in R&D deals with the big issues that arise when we ask how Australian businesses can be encouraged to make a greater commitment to R&D. The report addresses all aspects of the matter. It deals with the special needs of small and medium-sized enterprises—SMEs. It considers what drives major international corporations to invest in R&D in Australia. It examines how to improve the collaboration between public sector research agencies and the private sector and it makes suggestions for refining the government's R&D programs so that they will work even better.

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that Australia remains a place for generating world-class ideas. Already we are punching above our weight in the generation of ideas and in the quality of our science and R&D, but we must do more. We must ensure that the right systems are in place to take these great ideas and make them work for Australia. We must commercialise them on the global market. While this is

primarily the responsibility of individual businesses, there is an important role for the government in smoothing the path to market.

Our report sets out 48 recommendations to help businesses undertake more R&D and help them reap the benefits of that R&D. Unfortunately I do not have time to go through each of these 48 recommendations, but let me inform the House of their main themes. The first is that the broad range of R&D programs associated with the government's Backing Australia's Ability program, introduced in January 2001, appear to be working well and enjoying wide support. However, it is early days yet for many of the programs and more time is needed to bed them down. Our report recommends that the programs be evaluated at the appropriate time and refined where necessary. We say that this is particularly important for the programs that feature tax concessions.

We single out the incremental or premium tax concession in particular. The committee consider that it is very useful to have an incremental tax concession that encourages the maximum possible R&D. Our report considers a number of suggestions made by witnesses as to how best to structure an incremental tax concession. The committee's report does not come down in favour of any one proposal, but we do recommend that the government carefully consider all of them when the time comes to review and amend the tax concession programs.

The second broad theme of our recommendations is that businesses are more likely to commit to R&D when they are confident about the longer-term nature of government R&D programs, so we recommend that these programs be maintained for rolling periods of not less than five years. The third broad theme of our recommendations is that SMEs deserve greater encouragement to undertake R&D and commercialise their research outcomes. We make a number of recommendations in this area. One that I feel strongly about is the expansion of mentoring services available to SMEs so that they can learn first-hand how to commercialise R&D from those who have already achieved success.

We also recommend that the current review of closer collaboration between universities and major publicly funded research organisations examine ways to encourage the Commonwealth research bodies to partner with SMEs in a meaningful way, including providing equity where appropriate. The fourth broad theme of our recommendations is that collaboration between public research bodies and private enterprise, especially SMEs, needs to improve. I ask members to note carefully the particular recommendations we make in this respect.

The fifth and final theme of our recommendations is that, notwithstanding the very high regard in which