

## Talking Point

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# Opportunity to reshape parliament

The next election offers community chance to transform governance, writes Meg Webb

Speculation is swirling about an early state election. However, the most interesting thing about the next election isn't the possible date, but the opportunity for a different approach.

Regardless of when it is called, the next election is guaranteed to deliver a different parliament.

The next parliament will have 35 lower house seats - 10 new ones up for grabs - with 18 seats required to form government. Neither Liberal nor Labor are likely to achieve that.

For the Liberal Party, this would mean holding its current 11 seats, winning back two that shifted to independents and winning five of the 10 new seats. Unlikely.

The Labor Party would need to hold its current eight seats, bring David O'Byrne back into the PLP and win nine of 10 new seats. Highly unlikely.

Does anyone imagine either Tasmanian Liberal or Labor command enough credibility in the community to attract a large statewide field of outstanding candidates to run under their banners?

Make no mistake, a party brand alone will not be enough to win seats in the next Tasmanian Parliament. Voters are learning fast to have a higher expectation for quality elected representatives.

Voters aspire to be represented not just by a tired party label, but by people of character, integrity and commitment to public service.

Recent history has demonstrated genuine community representation can be provided, and a real difference can be made, when communities choose high-quality, aspirational, independent representatives.

By necessity, the next government of Tasmania will be collaborative, and will likely have evolved beyond past models made up of a major party plus the Greens.

The next Tasmanian government presents an opportunity for a step-change in good governance in this State - an opportunity to break free of vested interests and the usual suspects who have pulled the strings for decades while delivering no real progress on the significant challenges we face.

Political parties of every colour are seen as serving the interests of certain backers - whether that is unions, environmentalists or the big end of town - leaving the community to doubt whose interests are being prioritized and served when those parties hold power.



Meg Webb MLC. Picture: Chris Kidd

A collaborative government, inclusive of strong independents, can restore confidence that community interests will be prioritized at the heart of decision-making.

This is an opportunity to vote into the next Parliament good people who will work differently.

I wonder what that might look like and who those new Parliamentarians will be? Think of the most lauded debates in our Parliament, often conscience debates, such as the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill.

These debates are typically led by cross-party partnerships or independents and are excellent examples of a collaborative, negotiated approach based on merit rather than party lines. In these debates, party interests are sidelined and we see our parliamentarians operating as individuals, representing the diversity of our community. Tasmanians can expect more of that in a collaborative government after the next election.

Which prompts the question: what will leadership look like in our next parliament?

A bellicose, dictatorial approach will not deliver results.

While the Covid crisis suited the autocratic, captain's call style of then-Premier Gutwein, the now-minority Government of Premier Rockliff is learning the hard way that cooperation and compromise are orders of the day.

Negotiation and inclusion will be strengths in a collaborative government, which will require the Tasmanian community and media to update its understanding of what effective leadership looks like.

Combative parliaments drive division in our community. But at the next election, the Tasmanian community can come together to reshape the governance of our state.

Whatever the date, let's seize the day.

**Meg Webb, Independent Member for Nelson**