

MLCs anger at 'gutless' Labor over donations

Debate begins on long-awaited reforms

Blair Richards

A last-minute decision by the Labor Party to wave the Liberals' political donations laws through the Upper House has prompted an angry reaction from independents.

The Bill to require political candidates and parties to publicly declare electoral donations of more than \$5000 passed the House of Assembly last year.

The Greens and Labor have argued the \$5000 threshold is too high.

Several MLCs had proposed amendments to the laws which would change not only donations disclosure but allow public funding of Tasmanian elections.

However when the Legislative Council was in the early stages of debating the Bill, Labor MLC Sarah Lovell said the party would not propose any amendments and would not support anyone else's amendments, which would allow the Bill to pass unchanged.

Outside parliament Opposition leader Rebecca White said Labor wanted to ensure Tasmania ended up with some state based donation disclosure before the next election.

"The Labor Party has it on good authority that the Liberal Government does not plan to



Independent MLC, Ruth Forrest.

continue to pursue donation disclosure reform in this state and that if the Bill is amended in any way they will not bring it back into the Lower House. That will be a disaster for Tasmanians, it will mean we have no state based disclosure laws at all," she said.

Murchison MLC Ruth Forrest labelled Labor's decision "gutless".

"I am just gobsmacked and disappointed at this."

Nelson MLC Meg Webb said she was "thoroughly disgusted".

"I'm utterly astonished by this decision that's come to light today from the Labor party...You don't look like an alternative government," Ms Webb said.

Under the legislation parties will be reimbursed at \$6 per first preference vote for every



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candidate elected or every candidate who receives at least 4 per cent of the primary vote.

Launceston MLC Rosemary Armitage flagged amendments about the reimbursement amounts.

"This Bill is essentially providing a two for one deal for candidates and parties. A generously high reportable donation threshold as well as the possibility of reimbursement from the public purse. This is wholly inappropriate in my opinion," Ms Armitage said.

"Based on the last election where approximately 340,000 votes were cast. This could translate to a substantial sum, around \$2m, from government taxpayers, if this Bill is passed. In a time where many are grappling with a cost of living crisis, the notion of handing out such sums of money either to political parties or candidates who garner 4 per cent of the vote understandably raising eyebrows."

The sitting was suspended to allow for a briefing.