

Voters will see right through it if MPs don't comply with

As our state is sent to an ultra-early election that no voter wants, questions will loom large about who will be donating towards it and who will benefit most?

With the uncertainty of new political donation laws set to come into effect on July 1 – in the middle of the election campaign period – Tasmanians should not be deprived of the long-awaited transparency from these new laws.

It will be a straight-up test of integrity for all parties and candidates running in this election, who should all commit to voluntarily abiding by the new laws from the

As the election looms, Tasmanians have a right to know who is donating to the campaigns of all candidates, writes **Meg Webb**

beginning of the campaign period. Under the new laws, during an electoral period any donation of \$1000 or more will have to be disclosed within seven days to the Tasmanian Electoral Commission and then published within a further seven days.

In addition, there will be a ban on anonymous donations, cash donations above \$100 and foreign donations.

If the new rules won't apply until half-way through this election campaign, we risk encouraging a swath of corporate donations to major parties prior to that date, to avoid the requirement of disclosure.

The weeks of the June election campaign should not be regarded as a convenient disclosure loophole to be exploited in a secretive cash-grab.

At this time, citizens have high levels of distrust in political leaders,

and faith in our democracy is eroding.

We know that in a small jurisdiction it doesn't take large sums to secure access and influence to political decision-makers.

In Tasmania, demonstrating integrity and restoring trust through transparency is not merely a legal nicety, it is a moral imperative.

Regardless of the start date for the new laws, all it would take to deliver



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transparency and demonstrate integrity to the Tasmanian people would be for the Labor and Liberal leaders to immediately commit to disclosing donations voluntarily in line with the new laws – from the time the election is called.

Why wouldn't they?

Are they ashamed to reveal where their donations come from? Will disclosure deter their treasured donors? If so, perhaps we can assume those donors most certainly expected a quid pro quo or special consideration in exchange for their largesse.

The continued reluctance from both major parties to deliver

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laws on donation transparency

transparency to the greatest degree possible tells us exactly how far down their list of priorities integrity sits.

The 51st parliament of Tasmania, which has just come to a screaming halt, was characterised by a long-term Liberal government no longer hiding its favourable treatment of vested interests.

There was a pattern of behaviour from the Rockliff government consistently seeking to jettison rights and suppress opportunities for communities to have a democratic say, especially in planning decisions that shape our neighbourhoods and state.

Similarly, the in-name-only Labor opposition fell over itself to offer support to these government efforts, perhaps indicating a six-of-one, half-a-dozen-of-the-other approach from corporate donors.

Opaque donations pave the way for a government emboldened to put vested interests ahead of public interest. Hidden donations sit alongside unchecked pork-barrelling and corporate welfare, all of which we risk seeing flagrantly pursued yet again in this abruptly called state election.

The only acceptable approach to demonstrate a genuine commitment to transparency and integrity will be

for the new donation disclosure rules to come into effect immediately – voluntarily if not legally – to cover the entire election campaign period.

Can our political leaders of all stripes rise to this transparency and integrity challenge?

Will they take this opportunity to restore public trust and reset the power balance in Tasmania's political landscape by voluntarily implementing the new disclosure laws as passed?

Or will they hide behind weasel words while rorting the few weeks between now and July 1?

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