

Release: 21st November 2007

Ref: 2207

ELECTION: What are Young Voters Thinking?

UnitingCare Wesley, EARTH and the Youth Affairs Council of SA have brought a group of young voters together to consider the Federal election and impacts for young people. Members of this panel are available to talk with media.

All of the young people involved are disappointed with short-term focus of this year's federal election campaign, a point of overwhelming agreement from a group of young voters.

Young people (aged 18-24) attending a young citizen's forum hosted by UnitingCare Wesley have expressed their disappointment with the short term and 'inward' focus of the election campaign.

There was consensus among the young forum that climate change was a major issue. Many were familiar with the presentations from Al Gore's climate ambassadors, and all believed that Australia should do more to become a leading example to developing countries in reducing of greenhouse gas emissions.

The young voters are concerned that voters, in general, are being regarded by the parties as only interested in short term personal gain, the 'what's in it for me?' approach. However, 21 year-old Deanna Howland of Somerton Park says "I care about the injustice of poverty, in Australia and overseas" "We should be increasing our overseas aid to 0.7% of our Gross National Income to invest in the future",

The forum participants talked about their concern for populations facing serious disadvantage such as refugees and Aboriginal Australians.

When considering the issues presented by the parties as priority issues, participants talk of fairness, or a lack of fairness. Most reflected on the housing affordability situation; Lucas, 20, of Windsor Gardens, lives independently in rented accommodation. He identified inequality in housing as a major issue. "There are people in South Australia who just don't have access to the basics of life. It is appalling that young people are sometimes resorting to skipping meals because of their tight budgets." While a majority of the young group lived with their parents, affordable housing was of considerable concern

Some asked why they are paid wages that are well below the minimum wage and most observed that they have very little opportunity to discuss employment conditions, being presented with a 'take it leave it' uncertain work – particularly in hospitality.

Participants recognised the importance of education but were also very frustrated by HECS fees, stating that it is crazy that students who have very low incomes pay large fees while high income older people get tax cuts. Surely, they argue, it makes more sense for a government to help students get the skills they need and collect the money through the tax system when people are older and can afford to pay through the tax system.

One member noted the prediction that their generation is likely to be the first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents, "so obviously health is important too", they observed.

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