

MEDIA RELEASE

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Party responses to key issues of concern promoted to one million Christians

With little more than two weeks to go until the Federal election, the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) today launched a website – promoted by a million flyers and booklets sent to churches throughout Australia – informing Christians about the different political party standpoints on key issues they care about.

The website www.australiavotes.org.au provides the responses of eight political parties, including the Coalition and Labor, to 24 questions on issues of interest to Christians ranging from homelessness and foreign aid to freedom of religion and the sexualisation of children. Tellingly, the Australian Greens only answered six of the questions, choosing to avoid scrutiny on a variety of issues where their policy is unlikely to be well-received by most Christians.

“The failure of the Australian Greens to answer 18 of the 24 questions – even where they have known positions on the issue such as their support for gay marriage and removing school chaplains – can only be seen as a cynical exercise to avoid scrutiny of their more radical policy positions,” he said.

“But as disturbing as the deception in not declaring their antagonism to faith in society, is the failure to comment on issues like youth unemployment, the funding of private schools and the sexualisation of children – all issues of concern to a broader constituency,” Mr Wallace said.

“This deception and narrow agenda is hardly the stuff of a legitimate third force in politics.”

Mr Wallace reiterated that Christians don’t vote as a homogenous block but that they tend to care about a broad range of moral and social justice issues which are likely to influence their vote.

“The questions put to political parties are in keeping with this wide range of interest and mean the parties have had to clearly state their policies on issues which sometimes fall below the radar of day-to-day election coverage.”

Mr Wallace said the responses to the questionnaire will be widely distributed among Australian churches from a broad range of denominations, with 250,000 16-page summary booklets sent out this week, along with 800,000 flyers promoting the www.australiavotes.org.au website (more than one million pieces of literature in all).

Party responses to each question were limited to 250 words, plus a dot-point summary which is used in the printed booklet. Website users have the option of customising the information by choosing particular parties and questions they wish to compare.

Some key commitments revealed in party responses on the website include:

- Federal Labor has said it will continue to tackle homelessness as a national priority and will continue with its funding initiatives in this area and plans to halve homelessness by 2020. By contrast the Coalition statement does not refer to funding for housing but details initiatives in the areas of mental health, illicit drug use and education.
- The Coalition has given a commitment to continue school chaplaincy funding at its present levels and make it an ongoing program. By contrast Labor has not guaranteed funding past “the end of the program” in December 2011, but has said it will conduct a consultation process to consider future options. Both Family First and the Christian Democratic Party want to extend the chaplaincy program.
- In response to a question about the proposed national school curriculum failing to acknowledge Australia’s Judeo-Christian heritage, the Coalition states that “If elected we will review the National Curriculum and widen the consultative process”. By contrast, Labor only talks about the consultation process which has already taken place.
- Both Labor and the Coalition have given a commitment to maintain the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman, as do Family First and the Christian Democratic Party. Despite the Greens publicly announcing they are in favour of gay marriage and promoting this to certain interest groups, they made the decision not to answer this question to the Christian constituency.
- Responding to concerns about the sexualisation of children, the Coalition has committed to review the “broken” classification system and task the review with developing a new way of ensuring that proper community standards are applied to all media. By contrast, Labor refers to the current classification system as “a valuable guide to Australians”.
- Labor has restated its commitment to mandatory ISP level filtering of RC content. By contrast, the Coalition is non-committal about ISP filtering.
- Both Labor and the Coalition have given clear commitments not to remove fringe benefits tax concessions for the not-for-profit sector. This was one of the many questions the Greens refused to answer.
- Both major parties said they would continue the practice of opening Parliament each day with the Lord’s Prayer. This is another question the Greens avoided.
- Both Labor and the Coalition have indicated they will take action to help end religious persecution overseas.

NB: The political parties which have responded to ACL's questionnaire are: the Australian Labor Party, the Coalition (Liberal and National Parties), Family First, Christian Democratic Party, Australian Sex Party, Climate Sceptics Party and the Non-Custodial Parents Party. The Australian Greens provided answers to only six of the 24 questions. Answers are in the parties' own words.

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