

Date: 8 April 2013 11:17

Subject: Tonight's your last chance to vote in Gellibrand Preselection

Dear Member,

Tonight is your last chance to have your say about who will represent Labor in Gellibrand.

And I wanted to take this chance to deal with an issue that arose yesterday at the voting place.

It became clear to me that some of Katie Hall's supporters had reached a view that I was responsible for material that disparaged her.

Given they had repeated the claim far and wide, before mentioning it to me, I think it's important I share with you what I told them: I did no such thing.

I categorically deny it and would certainly be willing to swear to it on my oath. I don't like that type of campaigning, I believe it to be wholly ineffective in any event.

Yesterday, I personally asked each of my supporters whether they were responsible for it and they emphatically denied it.

In the course of those discussions, one of them, not a member of our party, told me he had produced a Youtube video that represented Senator Conroy adversely. While I don't think it was intended maliciously, I don't think it's appropriate and I have asked for it to be removed.

Having now reviewed the material, it is clear that someone, with motivations that are reasonably obvious, most probably aware of the identity of the creator of the video, (he had not been shy in claiming credit for it) took some content elements from it and mixed it up into a nasty concoction that was deliberately calculated to make it appear the disparagement of Katie was coming from me. It was the quite the cunning plan.

I have been told who was responsible. And the material and circumstances that surround it make it obvious anyway.

It was certainly not coming from me. Indeed, I was and continue to be hopeful that Katie would get more votes than Tim Watts, making it all the more difficult for him to prevail if he polled behind two female candidates in the local vote.

The fact that this material arrived on the same day (Friday) as my own letter has been used to suggest I must therefore be responsible for both. That's an obviously absurd proposition, as I was not the only person able to use Australia Post's services for Friday delivery.

There is also a suggestion that the material has the same "postmark" when I am told by Australia Post any item processed for Friday delivery in metropolitan Melbourne would bear the same postmark. The days of individual post offices putting postmarks on envelopes are long gone, apparently. Australia Post use very large distribution centres for letters which is where postmarks come to be printed on envelopes.

These facts may not suit the excitable narrative of some but the simple truth is:

1) Katie Hall out-polling Tim Watts suited and suits me. Reducing her vote is not in my interests, quite the reverse.

2) My How To Vote card preferenced to Katie after first going to a strong female candidate Julia Mason. I am quite conscious that in some circumstances my preferences could help elect Katie. I am very comfortable about that. I have made it clear from the start - in word and deed - that I want a female to replace Nicola

Roxon. My How-to-vote card is the proof.

3) My personal interactions with Katie before and during this brief preselection campaign have been entirely positive and agreeable. I like her and wish her well.

While making those observations, let me share some of this first-time female preselection candidate's experiences:

1) "Do you support your husband's views?"

At first, I laughed when I got an email from one female branch member asking me a series of questions including that one. I resisted the temptation to denounce the question on feminist grounds but instead politely pointed out there were two excellent federal female Labor MPs married to two political journalists who are frequently very critical of the government. I argued, one more probably wouldn't hurt.

There are other branch members who told me they wanted to vote for me but couldn't or wouldn't because they didn't like my husband's views. While I give them points for honesty, their position is one that worries me. Not just because I didn't get their support but because of the fundamental illegitimacy of the thought process. No wonder we struggle to meet affirmative action targets set in 1994. No wonder so few women run, with nonsense of the kind Katie has suffered and with female candidates being assessed on the basis of their husbands. It's ugly. It's certainly not Labor at its best.

2) False claims I am a bankrupt.

I heard this one nearly everywhere I went with well-informed and savvy Gellibrand preselectors who seemed to know everything about everyone. For the record, I am not a bankrupt. If I was a bankrupt, I would not be eligible to serve in Federal Parliament, making a run for preselection seem a little strange. Yes, eight years ago, I had a bankruptcy annulled, after signing a guarantee on a business arrangement involving my husband. I had prepared for Liberals having a go at me about this one day by researching the circumstances of their Sir Garfield Barwick being bankrupt before he kicked on to become their Attorney-General and rather dastardly Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. I was ready to tell them also that even Abraham Lincoln had been bankrupt before he freed the slaves to help keep things in perspective.

But I never imagined in my wildest dreams that going through financial difficulty nearly ten years ago would be used to attack someone in the Labor party. The truth is that losing my home and fighting back from that tough time was easily the most formative and strengthening experience I've had. Fall down seven times. Stand up eight. That's what I believe in and that's the fighting spirit we need more of in the Labor party in the years ahead.

Thank you for your time and for listening over the past couple of weeks, if you haven't voted, please don't waste your precious opportunity to participate, even if it is a long drive over to Sheldon Receptions, 608-614 Somerville Road Sunshine West. You've got from 6pm to 8pm.

Yours,

Kimberley Kitching