

Progressive Atheists Inc.

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Victorian State By-Election Candidate Survey

Election Date: Saturday, 31 October 2015

Polwarth District By-Election

Answers & Comments of Candidate

Meredith Anne Doig

Australian Sex Party - Victoria

- 1. Special Religious Instruction:** do you approve of the minister for education removing SRI from class time in Victoria?

YES

Comment: Since the change of policy from "opt out" to "opt in", the number of SRI participants has plummeted by 40%. This shows parents are just not interested in having their child instructed in the doctrine of a single faith, separated from their friends. Much better to teach the whole class about the range of faiths in Australia, AND about non-religious moral philosophies like secular humanism and rationalism.

- 2. Special Religious Instruction:** do you support the removal of SRI from the education and training reform act?

YES

Comment: Public school education should return to being free, compulsory and secular. The inclusion of SRI in various Education Acts has been the result of sectarian religious lobbying over the last 50 years. This sort of religious privileging is no longer welcome.

- 3. Comparative Religious Education:** are you in favour of F-10 school curriculum in Victorian schools to teach about the 5 major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism) and in addition secular humanism / rationalism?

YES

Comment: It's important in our multicultural society to teach all students about the range of faiths present in Australia. This helps to "demystify The Other", building bridges across differences of language and culture. It's also important that students learn something of the rich history of moral philosophy that goes back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the Enlightenment era that did so much to free people of their subjugation to the "Divine Right of Kings" and the Church.

- 4. School Chaplain Alternatives:** are you in favour of the Victorian government providing funding for secular welfare workers to those schools who choose not to have a religious chaplain?

YES

Comment: The National Chaplaincy Program is blatantly discriminatory and should be scrapped. But schools need all the help they can get and so the Victorian Govt should compensate by funding secular welfare support officers for those schools that do not want religious chaplains.

- 5. Inclusive Schools:** are you in favour of Safe Schools Coalition Australia whose services aim to improve safety and inclusivity for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, their families and teachers, while taking a zero-tolerance approach to homophobia and transphobia in the school community?

YES

Comment: Respected organisations like "Beyond Blue" recognise the damage that's caused when LGBTIQ students feel excluded, bullied or belittled. It is now beyond doubt that human sexuality is not just male or female - there is a range that is all part of normal human sexuality. School programs that teach the reality of normal human sexuality should be welcomed and funded.

- 6. Respectful Relationships:** are you in favour of the new Victorian schools curriculum resource “Building Respectful Relationships – Stepping Out Against Gender-Based Violence” a new teaching resource for Victorian secondary students to learn how to build healthy relationships, understand global cultures, ethics and traditions, and to prevent family violence?

YES

Comment: Having read the report on the trial of this new curriculum on Respectful Relationships, I must say I think it is absolutely world class. Challenging the culture that has allowed hideous gender-based violence will not come only from schools, but it can't happen without schools playing their part.

- 7. Anti-discrimination Legislation:** should religious bodies be allowed to discriminate in employment even when religious faith is not a genuine occupational qualification for that job?

NO

Comment: Unless being a person of faith is an inherent requirement of a job (eg, being a rabbi of a synagogue or a minister of a church), there should be no exemptions from anti-discrimination law in employment. Full Stop!

- 8. Mandatory Reporting Laws:** are you in favour of removing religious exemptions to the mandatory reporting of child abuse?

YES

Comment: Child abuse is hideous. There should be no privileging of religious organisations by giving them exemptions from mandatory reporting when it comes to protecting children.

- 9. Abortion Laws:** are you in favour of maintaining the current laws on abortion in Victoria?

YES

Comment: The Victorian law on abortion is fair and reasonable. Women have had to fight hard for years to win access to safe, legal abortion and there must be NO watering down of this law.

10. End of Life Choices: would you support a bill that allowed a terminally or incurably ill person the right to choose the manner and timing of their death, under strict safeguards, by providing humane medical assistance?

YES

Comment: Access to voluntary assisted dying has been shown to work well in other countries - it does NOT lead to a "slippery slope". In fact, it's been shown that people facing end-of-life decisions feel better when they know they have the choice to die when they choose, with whom they choose, and where they choose. Consistently over 80% of people have said they want this choice - it's high time they were given it.

11. Medicinal Cannabis: are you in favour of developing a Victorian industry to produce cannabis for medicinal purposes?

YES

Comment: The Victorian Govt has led the way and now the Federal Govt is seeing the light. But it will take a long time for a properly regulated medicinal cannabis industry to be developed. In the meantime, there should be an amnesty for those whose conditions benefit from medicinal cannabis.

12. Climate Change: South Australian has a renewable energy target of 50% by 2025, and the ACT has a target of 90% by 2020. Would you support a bill for a transparent target for renewable energy in Victoria akin to targets in SA and ACT?

YES

Comment: The Victorian Govt is dragging its feet on establishing a renewable energy target. Part of that should be support for wind farms - if farmers want turbines on their property, they should have the right, within reasonable standards, to have them.

13. Victorian Duties and Taxes: are you in favour of removing religious exemptions in the Duties Act 2000?

YES

Comment: The fact religious organisations get AUTOMATIC tax exemptions is completely out of date and should be removed. If religious organisations do good works, they would get tax exemptions as a "charity", just like non-religious organisations who do good works. Why should taxpayers foot the bill for "advancing" religion? In this day and age, it makes no sense. While income tax exemption is a Federal matter, there are all sorts of tax exemptions enjoyed by religious organisations in the State arena. Unless a religious organisation can demonstrate its activities are "charitable" (and not just promoting faith), they should not have the privilege of State tax exemptions.

14. Victorian Duties and Taxes: are you in favour of removing religious exemptions in the Debits Tax Act 1990?

YES

Comment: As above.

15. Victorian Duties and Taxes: are you in favour of removing religious exemptions in the Payroll Tax Act 1971?

YES

Comment: As above.

16. Victorian Duties and Taxes: are you in favour of removing religious exemptions in the Land Tax Act 1958?

YES

Comment: As above.

17. Prayer in the Victorian Parliament: are you in favour of the Lord's prayer being replaced with silent reflection (as in the ACT parliament) at the commencement of each sitting day?

NO

Comment: Australia is a multicultural society, with people freely following a number of faith traditions, or no faith at all. Rather than "silent reflection" - which I think would be observed in the breach - I think it would be better to offer a range of prayers from Victoria's major faith traditions AND reflections from moral philosophers who are not religious AND reflections from Australia's indigenous peoples. This would not only recognise our multicultural society but present fresh thoughts for consideration each day of parliament.

18. Prayer in the Victorian Parliament: are you in favour of sanctioned affirmations from religious and nonreligious worldviews, in addition to the Lord's prayer, to be said on a rotational basis at the commencement of each sitting day?

YES

Comment: See above.

Q8: Please add any additional comments you may have regarding this survey in the text box below. Thank you for your time and consideration.

The Australia I grew up in was respected across the world as a forward-looking, compassionate and progressive society. Over the past 15 years or so, I have been dismayed by what we have become as a nation. I want to play a part in returning the country I love to something I can once again be proud of - open-minded and open-hearted.

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