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Title:

Politics in the Community - Adelaide Girls' High School

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Article By The Premier, Mr. Don Dunstan, For Adelaide Girls High School Magazine.

Politics In The Community.

Decisions taken by the three levels of Government in Australia - Federal, State and local -- affect the daily lives of us all in quite fundamental ways.

This is true not only of such obvious, and dramatic, decisions about whether to enter into a particular foreign alliance, raise taxes or change the value of our currency but in the smaller, day to day, concerns of us all.

Young people today are, quite properly, very concerned about protecting our environment against pollution either by destructive industrial processes, uncontrolled development or other factors.

Governments have the greatest responsibility - though it is one that is shared by all citizens - to ensure that we hand on to future generations an environment as pleasant, or better, than the one we inherited.

Federal Government has a large role to play in this.

So does a State Government and so, too, does a local council. Each of them has to decide what is acceptable and necessary or what is not to be tolerated.

This can be a major decision -- over whether, say, to allow a multi-million dollar industrial development to go ahead because of the jobs and other development it can provide or whether environmental consideration should over-ride other factors.

But a local council's decision on whether to set aside just an acre of land for open space - and so create amenities for residents - or whether to give the land over to housing and so increase its revenue and provide more homes is making a choice that people in the area may feel is just as important to them.

The point is that these are political decisions.

They are made by elected bodies on behalf of the people they represent.

But such groups, although they may be extremely powerful, are by no means infallible.

If democracy is to have real meaning there must be the maximum possible public involvement in the decision making and debate about it.

That is why I believe it is a citizen's right, and duty, to involve himself or herself as actively as possible in political life.

This does not mean being necessarily committed to one particular party or political philosophy.

It does mean taking an interest in matters under public discussion, familiarising oneself with the arguments for and against a particular course of action and, if you feel strongly about it, making your voice heard.

Our system of Government depends on this exchange of ideas. A Government that does not know what people - its voters - think is not a good Government.

An electorate that is prepared to let a Government operate ~~without~~ without intelligent scrutiny and debate is in peril of getting a bad Government.

Most people lead very busy lives. ~~Their~~ Their days are spent working or studying and there is little time for relaxation. They simply do not have the time to involve themselves in all the details of political life.

Nonetheless citizens do have a responsibility to see that the people they elect are living up to their promises, governing for the general good and accounting in public for their actions.

Everybody does this with their vote at election time.

But a healthy democracy is one in which there is continuing, informed debate on the great issues of the day.

Young people today are much more alert and aware of the very serious problems that confront Australia and the important decisions we all must take if we are to solve them.

This is, as far as I am concerned, one of the most encouraging trends in our society. I hope it continues and can be strengthened.

56

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