



KELVIN THOMSON MP
Federal Member for Wills

***Meet your Federal Member of Parliament Youth Night at the Moreland
City Council Concert Hall
Thursday 5th July 2007***

I would like to firstly thank and welcome everyone for coming along this evening.

I got interested in the efforts to conserve and protect the areas of habitat and the various threats to them which I regard as a same because Australia is very fortunate in wildlife that we have the beauty and diversity of it. Through my interest in conversation issues I became interested in politics.

I discovered that Governments, for better or worse make the decisions that determine the fate of Australia's wildlife and the fate of the environment. So I became interested in the political process and I joined the Labor way back in 1975, partly because I thought that Gough Whitlam was on the right track and things that he was doing were forward thinking and about Australia as a nation. Also because I thought the Labor Party was the best in relation to environment protection. You always get a better environment protection outcome with the Labor Party than you get with the Liberal Party.

So, looking at the situation today I'd say there has been a decline in civic engagement and participation over the course of the past few decades. That is true of the political process and so mass political parties, like the Labor Party have struggled to get people involved. Coming along to meetings, involved in our campaigning, policy making and the like. It's also true outside the political process that community based organisations such as Rotary and Service Clubs and so on have experienced a similar problem, which is also true for sporting clubs and the like.

People have done all kinds of surveys and investigations into this. One of the strongest of those surveys suggests that it's TV that's the key culprit, that prior to TV people used to get out and about to meet up with others but since TV things like the street corner meeting have become a thing of the past. And it's clear they are a thing of the past. There's no way we can resurrect them but having said that it is important that we have a robust political democracy with as many people we can possibly engage and involve, and that we make use of modern media to communicate. One of the things that Anthony Cianflone from my office has been organising, with Jonathan Hockey, is the YouTube. They have put a YouTube display based around a visit I paid to WestWyk

which is in Brunswick. It's an environmental centre close to where people live. but it's looking at sustainability and water and energy and the various things that we do that impact on the environment so I've done a first one, I'm intending to do more, I'm looking to get footage from tonight so hopefully you'll excuse the filming process and I think it's important that we provide opportunities for people to access what we're doing through the internet and through new communications media.

The political process that we have in Australia and around the world has within it very great challenges. There is the war on terrorism and I think the war on terrorism has been carried out very poorly. The leadership of it has been very poor, and so if you think of it as a war it is not going well.

It feels like there is an increased terrorist threat since 2001, rather than a sense that we are getting on top of this and reducing the threat. One of the things that has most dismayed me is the conduct of the United States and Australia invading Iraq. This seems to me to have played right into Osama Bin Ladin's hands and provided a propaganda victory for Al Quaida of the first order.

So when the Prime Minister says in his statement today that we need to remain in Iraq indefinitely in order to produce good humanitarian outcomes, in order to reduce stability, in order to ensure that Al Quaida doesn't have a win, these are precisely the problems that we generated by invading Iraq in the first place and that the instability that is there, the threat of a win for Al Quaida, these sorts of things, have been a direct consequence of the decision by the United States and Australia to invade Iraq without a proper UN mandate.

The other thing the Prime Minister talked about today was the idea that we need to be in Iraq to secure our energy supplies. That is our oil, our petrol. Now in the first place this is an astonishing thing to hear now because for years the Prime Minister and the United States have been saying our motives for being in Iraq were noble motives. We've not there out of economic self interest, but now they say we're there in order to protect our access to oil. My response to this is that where Australia should be going is in the direction of alternatively fuels.

It is necessary for environment sustainability that we look to things like LPG and natural gas to fuel our motor vehicles. The technology is there. The infrastructure is there, I drive a LPG car and I can assure you that the performance, fuel economy and every thing else is excellent, so we can do these things. Australia has very substantial reserves of gas from our various offshore reserves, basins and the like and we should be making use of those reserves rather than saying it is necessary to remain in Iraq indefinitely, potential being party to the killing of innocent men, women and children, exposing ourselves to terrorist attack, creating a propaganda coo for Osama Bin Laden on this basis. It's not a basis for us continuing to be there.

The other thing that is a major global challenge is Global Warming, Climate Change. The earth is a remarkable planet in the way it supports human life. We have a narrow atmosphere which manages to ensure that not all of the sun's rays bounce back out as they get reflected off the earth's surface. Naturally having that atmosphere is a good thing as it enables the earth to be just the right temperature but the proportion of carbon in the atmosphere has increased drastically in the last 150 years or so. So it was 280 parts per million, and now is 380 parts per million. Scientists are telling us it is headed for 500 parts per million and beyond by the year 2050.

The consequences of that increase in carbon in the atmosphere which is caused by low regenerated electricity from coal and from gas and also petrol driven motor vehicles. The consequences of that increase in carbon in the atmosphere are that our planet's weather is changing. In particular, temperatures are rising, polar caps are melting, sea levels are rising and we are getting more frequent and more severe extreme weather events. We are talking about droughts, floods, bushfires, cyclones, hurricanes and the like. These things are becoming more frequent, more severe and the projections are this will be even more so in the decades to come. The consequences for Australia are very severe. The south eastern consequence is more frequent droughts and more severe droughts and the risk and prospect of more bush fires. Obviously if the place is hotter and dryer it poses a greater bush fire risk. There is also in northern Australia the prospect of coral bleaching, destroying the Great Barrier Reef and of tropical diseases being sucked further south. The loss of snow cover as well.

There are a whole series of very serious changes to our climate going on. In order to tackle these things, the essential things that we need to do are first, international co-operation. That's why Labor has been so strong on the Kyoto Protocol and climate change. If we're going to be serious about international co-operation we have to be part of it and not sit outside of it and undermine it, so we support international co-operation through the Kyoto Protocol.

Second thing we need to do is to set a serious target for emission reductions as the basis for emissions trading regime and the target scientists are telling us is necessary is a 60% cut by 2050 and that's what Labor has committed itself to.

The third thing that we need to do is to promote renewable energy. That's wind power, solar power, solar bp, geothermal, the various alternative energy sources which don't generate carbon emissions (inaudible) .We believe that the mandatory renewable target needs to be lifted substantially and unfortunately the Howard Government hasn't been interested in renewable energy so we simply haven't had an increase in the target and are getting the investment in renewable that we need. There the key things in relation to global warming.

There are obviously many other political issues and challenges that we have. There's the skills crisis and we're not getting enough investment in education, whether it's at a secondary level, and there are issues in schools in this area,

or at tertiary level or in the area of trades and apprenticeships. In each of these areas you can see that the Commonwealth has reduced its resources that are available, that it's expected students to pick up more of the tab with the HECS fees and the like and that as a result tertiary education has become less affordable and there has been a decline in our skill set as a nation and we've been in the business of outsourcing this. We've been bringing in skilled migrants and using some of those 457 visas and so on to try and cover up for our failure to invest in educating and training Australians. So I think that the skill shortage is a real problem.

I think that housing affordability is a real problem. It is harder for young people to purchase a house now than it was when I was a young person and it is increasingly out of the reach of young people. John Howard says his government is best to look after interest rates. The fact is that people are paying a higher proportion of their disposable income in interest rate repayments than they ever were. The highest interest rates under Paul Keating did not lead to people paying as much in terms of interest as there now going. So housing affordability has declined.

The other thing I think is worth mentioning before I finish up is the question of enrolling and getting on the electoral roll. Regrettably, it's a case of around half 18 year olds across Australia are not presently enrolled. So at any given time about 50% aren't on the roll and the Government made changes which mean that when it announces an election, on the day it announces the election, at 8pm, the roles will close and so this means that a lot of people will miss out, they won't get to vote and of course many young people will be affected by that. I am keen that we make people aware of this change in the electoral enrolment arrangements and that we get as many people enrolling, young people enrolling as we possible can. You may be aware that it's possible for people to enrol as 17 year olds, although its not possible for them to vote until they turn 18 and to that end we've got some of the enrolment forms sitting around here, also with some other material. Anthony Cianflone and Kerry Gordon have gone to some trouble to make that available. You should feel free to grab anything that here and to take it away with you and have a good look at it.

If any one has any questions or issues they would like to raise with me, please feel free to do so as I am more than happy to discuss anything of concern.

Ends.