

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Melbourne – Thursday 10 August 2023

MEMBERS

Will Fowles – Chair

Evan Mulholland – Deputy Chair

Brad Battin

David Ettershank

Sam Hibbins

Emma Kealy

Nathan Lambert

Lee Tarlamis

Emma Vulin

WITNESS

Steph Price, Treasurer, Victorian Socialists.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I declare open the public hearings for the Electoral Matters Committee's Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands on which we are gathered here today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I am Evan Mulholland, the Deputy Chair of the committee and Member for Northern Metropolitan. The other members of the committee here today are:

Emma VULIN: Hi, I am Emma Vulin from Pakenham.

Nathan LAMBERT: Nathan Lambert, Preston.

Lee TARLAMIS: Lee Tarlamis, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sam HIBBINS: Sam Hibbins, Member for Prahran.

David ETTERS HANK: David Ettershank, Western Metro Region.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: And Brad Battin and Emma Kealy are apologies for this session.

I welcome Steph Price, the Treasurer of the Victorian Socialists party.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you do go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to this penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as possible. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

I invite you to proceed with a brief 5-minute opening statement to the committee, which will be followed by questions.

Steph PRICE: Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. This is our first occasion participating in this process. We have had an opportunity to review some of the submissions made and have listened to the initial hearing and some of what has occurred today. Our submission to the committee canvassed a range of issues. I do not propose to re-agitate all of them. I will go through some of them briefly and then expand on anything of particular interest to those here.

As an initial statement, our view is that the elections were generally well conducted, noting of course concerns raised, particularly material issues related to ballot paper availability. None of the seats contested by our candidates were affected by those issues. I think our assessment as to the election conduct is borne out by the responses to the VEC's surveying conducted at the conclusion of the election, which found that the vast majority of voters and candidates were very happy with their experience on polling day and the operations of the commission. To the extent that we experienced challenges in the course of the voting period, these largely arose as a result of some of the tensions that can emerge in the conduct of an event on the scale of an election.

The commissioner and VEC staff have spoken at length. Numerous questions have been posed about the staffing challenges associated with marshalling a large and temporary workforce to conduct the election. Necessarily, that means there will be a mix of skills, experience and personal approaches within that pool. In

our experience, and certainly that of other parties we are aware, based on submissions, there are also widely varying levels of familiarity with the *Electoral Act* itself. At times this resulted in unlawful directions being issued and frequently inconsistent decisions being made. The problems associated with these discrepancies were compounded by a clear lack of an escalation and resolution point within the commission, and for us, the frankly confusing and opaque complaints process.

The second tension that we understand is being managed by the commission relates to its need to secure the use of a sufficient number of premises for use as voting centres, and in particular early voting centres, understanding that on polling day the majority of polling places are within schools or facilities of a similar nature. This is obviously distinct to EVCs, where frequently commercial and retail premises were selected. Often they were situated within larger commercial or retail premises. Shopping centres would be the most common example. In our experience, the VEC was not always well able to manage the tension between the use of these premises for a public purpose and the business, political and property interests of shopping centre management on some occasions, or businesses in the vicinity on others, where they sought to assert those interests in opposition to the conduct of the election. In our view, where there is such a tension, it must be resolved in favour of the important public function being conducted at these premises. Reasonable analogies that I think are useful that we have recent experience with would be COVID vaccination clinics and COVID testing clinics, which involved significant and large numbers of people at particular premises involved in a particularly important public activity, which no doubt caused some consternation amongst businesses in the surrounding areas but of course the activity going on was of sufficient importance that that took precedence.

Another analogy would be public works that occur. Significant public works occurring in Victoria at the moment cause many hassles for many people, but the nature of the importance of those works again means they take precedence over any associated difficulties that surrounding businesses might experience. So we would ask that the committee consider requiring the VEC to seek to obtain the use of public facilities for early voting centres as they do on polling day, potentially recommending additional time be allowed for those premises to be secured and additional resourcing if needed so that leases can be for a longer term, and if those are not possible and commercial premises are secured, requiring the VEC to issue clear directions to surrounding businesses as to the expected nature of activity that will occur in the ordinary course of an election. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you. I will start the questioning, just discussing behavioural issues and escalation processes and whatnot. It is something that has been widely canvassed. Also widely canvassed, throughout the campaign at least and in the media, was the behaviour of and complaints against Victorian Socialists booth workers and volunteers. Did your party receive any complaints via the VEC or contact via the VEC about behavioural issues?

Steph PRICE: I will note things down.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: No worries.

Steph PRICE: Much has been made today of the sort of apparent universal understanding that Victorian Socialists were the subject of numerous complaints about our conduct and that it was widely reported in the media. As far as I can see, there is not much evidence for that proposition. Despite a number of questions put to other parties today, if we sort of look at the submissions themselves, the Victorian Liberal Party was the only party to name Victorian Socialists in its submission. I think there is one media report related to a particular early voting centre that did not name the Victorian Socialists, named 'conduct in general'. As to the question as to whether complaints were put to us, I mean, remarkably, we were provided with no detail about specific complaints. It was never suggested to us that anything our campaigners did was unlawful or contrary to the *Electoral Act*.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I was reading your submission, and you mentioned the incident at Kalkallo in your submission in regard to walking with voters at the polling booth. Having been at that centre, I understand a number of voters, when walking quite a distance sometimes from the car park or across the road, as there was limited parking, as the Victorian Socialists workers were walking with those voters, declined the approach – like a 'No, thank you' – and volunteers continued to walk with them and talk with them about your party to the voter, even after declining. Do you see how this might be an issue for voters?

Steph PRICE: I mean, I was not at Kalkallo, and we have referenced Kalkallo in our submission because from our perspective that was an example of quite problematic conduct – being that a direction was issued by the election staff present that it was prohibited conduct to walk and talk, which for us is an example of an unlawful direction, certainly an incorrect direction and one that we would seek to escalate with the commission to have an appropriate direction made that certainly walking and talking is permitted and entirely expected in an election campaign.

Our campaigners are certainly under instruction to cease contact with anyone who is not interested in our party. It is not useful for us to continue conversations with people that are not interested in our politics or our party, and frankly, it is a waste of our time. Having said that, our approach is to seek to engage in conversations with electors who may be open to voting for a socialist party. That for us means talking to people, asking them questions about their life, themselves, their work and their union and responding with, you know, what of our policies relate to the experience of their life. Our campaigning, quite appropriately I would say as a minor party, seeks to engage people in a more active fashion than is often the case for the major parties, which rely substantially on marketing, advertising and historic voter bases that we cannot rely on. If you look through our social media throughout the campaign you will see post after post after post of persons whose stories we shared about how excited they were to come to a booth to meet somebody that wants to talk to them about their life and how socialist politics might relate to them. That was really our overwhelming experience of campaigning.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I am interested in your comments about venues, particularly for early voting centres and perhaps moving them to more council or community venues. It is something that has been canvassed in other witness testimony as well, but particularly when businesses are overstepping the mark – you referenced Greenvale. I understand locally that some businesses were concerned that your volunteers were approaching customers that were actually sitting in their outdoor dining areas and reported it to the VEC. Would you consider this a valid complaint – that if someone is sitting down for a coffee outside a cafe, that is not an appropriate place to approach a person that might not be voting?

Steph PRICE: Sorry, I just want to check if we have mentioned Greenvale. My campaign was in the north. I am not as familiar with the west.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is in the north.

Steph PRICE: Beyond mine – I am in Preston. Sorry. If you could just elaborate – Greenvale is a shopping centre – because this is not a complaint that was ever put to us, so I am not familiar with it. So your position is that Greenvale is a shopping centre. There were people –

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Both at Greenvale shopping centre and at Meadow Heights shopping centre within the seat of Greenvale, there were reports that your party workers were approaching people that were sitting down at established venues that had outdoor dining. Would you consider this a valid complaint in terms of the conversation about early voting centres and appropriate places?

Steph PRICE: Well, certainly no complaints of that nature were put to us – and I would say that we do not see politics as something that only occurs on election day. For us it is not purely a matter of talking to people about voting for us right now. We talk to people in all facets of our lives. We are a rank-and-file organisation based on people who campaign in their workplaces, in their communities and at their universities. We certainly do not see anything wrong with seeking to engage with other citizens about political issues, even if they are having a cup of coffee. But I will reiterate that certainly if somebody indicates to us that they are not interested in socialist politics, we would cease the conversation; it is of no value to us.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I want to ask if you think there is an appropriate amount of volunteers at a polling booth; there have been some suggestions of possibly limiting this. I note there was a polling place in Broadmeadows that had one entrance to a hall where the Victorian Socialists had eight volunteers, more than double of any other party, which caused some elderly voters to actually turn around and go home. What is your view on the amount of volunteers at polling booths, or possibly limiting registered volunteers per entrance?

Steph PRICE: I mean, in general we do not support any attempts to prescribe or limit the number of volunteers at polling booths. As indicated, clearly as a minor party, and this has been reflected in submissions of other minor parties, we take a different approach to campaigning than the major parties do. We cannot rely on a significant historical base of voters, and we cannot rely on a significant proportion of people having seen

one of our television ads or billboards and forming a view that they would vote for our party. We do not take any vote for granted. Every single vote that we win on election day is on the basis of a conversation that we have had with an elector who is interested and supportive of our politics, and we would see it as an additional benefit to the major parties if minor parties were to have their capacity to engage in those conversations restricted.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Tarlamis.

Lee TARLAMIS: Thank you. I was just wondering: in your submission you talk about lengthening the time lines for the election process, and we have heard from previous submitters around having a comprehensive review of all the different time lines, but specifically adding an extra week between the close of nominations and the beginning of voting. Could you elaborate on your views about the changes to time lines?

Steph PRICE: I am not involved in that side of the administration of our party. I am aware that the people who are under immense pressure in that period. It is on that basis that we would seek additional time to undertake all the necessary activities: printing, designing – you know, those sorts of things. Again, as a minor party our resources are extraordinarily limited, so any additional time in that regard is of value.

Lee TARLAMIS: No worries. You also spoke about the choice of selection of venues. With regard to that, if there was a way in which the state Act could prevail over local – there is a suggestion that we could look at whether or not there is a possibility that the provisions with signage and such should take precedence during that election period. Is that something that you would share? And also maybe in decision-making about hiring a venue, as part of the discussions before a lease or rental agreement was signed, that there is an understanding of the shopping centre or location – that these provisions will be allowed in terms of signage and other things.

Steph PRICE: Yes, I think that clarity around the interaction between the *Electoral Act* and any local laws would be beneficial and note that in instances where there have been disputes in that regard, some of the larger parties are able to litigate those and have those matters resolved in their favour. I believe that the Labor Party did so in this election, and in the federal election one of the more significant teal candidates was able to take a matter to the Supreme Court and again have that determined in her favour. That is not an option available to us. So legislative clarity on that point would be of use to us, and I think we would be for that on the basis that, as I say, we think it is important to recognise the significant and important nature of the conduct of elections and the capacity of people to publicise their candidates and their views in that election period. I think that should not be unduly restricted by local laws. Similarly, I think that it should be understood that if you enter into an agreement – and it is confusing to me that this is not apparent – with the electoral commission for the conduct of a voting centre within your premises, that you are aware that that would also involve people attending for that purpose and the display of electoral material.

Lee TARLAMIS: In your submission you also briefly touched on the abolition of group voting tickets. Are there any other changes to the upper house voting system or lower house voting system for that matter that the Victorian Socialists have a position on?

Steph PRICE: I checked with the people in our party that know about this, because it is not me. Our position is we are for the abolition of the current system. We do not, as I understand it, have a view as to what would replace it but would seek to be involved in any further processes in that regard.

Lee TARLAMIS: Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. Mr Hibbins.

Sam HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. I am just going on from group voting tickets. Do you have a view in terms of the time line for the abolition of group voting tickets – that it should be done prior to the next election?

Steph PRICE: Prior to the next election, yes. Presumably with a replacement in place with sufficient time for parties to engage and prepare accordingly.

Sam HIBBINS: Yes, okay. Thank you. But no views in terms of what the make up of the upper house should be or what have you?

Steph PRICE: No. No views today, but at a later date we may well seek to submit if there is an additional process.

Sam HIBBINS: Can I ask now about the issue that has been raised around campaigning and what have you around booths. Obviously in your submission you are opposed to any restrictions on the ability to campaign. Do you see an issue with, for example, some violent campaigners preventing other campaigners from speaking to voters?

Steph PRICE: This was something that was sort of referenced in a few submissions. I am not sure that it was ever specifically indicated to be in relation to us, but from my perspective I am not quite sure how it would be that a candidate in a conversation or a volunteer in a conversation with somebody could prevent them from engaging with other people. It seems not to stack up to reality. It seems a concern that only is raised in relation to minor party campaigning.

Certainly the Member for Preston and I spent many hours together at our early voting centre. It was not an uncommon occurrence for a rusted-on Labor voter to go straight to the Member for Preston and seek only to take his card and not to engage with anyone else. I had no expectation that the Member for Preston would then direct that voter to me or to any of the other candidates. It is certainly up to each voter to determine who they seek to engage with on election day or at an early voting centre, and if somebody is in a conversation with a particular campaigner that is of value and continues for a period of time, you know, all well and good. Certainly I had a number of long conversations, and, as I say, that is really one of the characteristics of our campaigning – long, good conversations with people about our politics.

Sam HIBBINS: That might extend from walking into the polling booth to right up to the exclusion zone.

Steph PRICE: It may well. I mean, walking and talking.

Sam HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. Now can I just go to examples of problematic behaviour that your candidates may have faced or volunteers may have faced. And using examples of those, what perhaps would you like to see if there is any strengthened regulations or rules so that a specific behaviour could be prevented?

Steph PRICE: I think, to be frank, the problematic conduct that we experienced was mostly from parties that are not likely to be influenced or affected by regulation, so I do not suggest that there is any regulation that would resolve that. I think that what we would seek is, as we have indicated, a clearer and better established and detailed point of escalation within the commission in relation to serious conduct. Serious misconduct, we would say, and certainly it was conduct experienced by our campaigners, is violence – so, you know, actual violence. It is threats of violence. For those matters, we would seek to have a clear escalation point within the commission to agitate those. Beyond that, much has been made about recommendations in relation to a code of conduct. We think that the *Electoral Act* sets out quite well what campaigners can and cannot do and should and should not do. We would be quite pleased with anything which requires campaigners, candidates and volunteers to indicate an understanding and a familiarity with what the *Electoral Act* does provide, because certainly some of the things that we experienced were complaints, as you have indicated, being made about us walking and talking at the same time, complaints about us approaching people and complaints that we were encouraging people to vote for us. If you can believe it or not, we were approached by a number of volunteers from another party who suggested to us that it was coercive to talk to somebody about why they should vote for us and that in fact all you are allowed to do is to say the name of your party and hand them a piece of paper. So we would be quite pleased with anything which provides a more uniform understanding amongst participants in the election about in fact what is permitted conduct in the course of the election campaign.

Sam HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. Mr Lambert.

Nathan LAMBERT: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Steph, for coming in. I think I said to you outside earlier that I appreciated your succinct and well-written submission to this committee. I will pick up where the Member for Prahran left off. Obviously, as you have identified, these questions of candidate safety, inclusion and campaigner safety are obviously important ones. I know you said you had not received a lot of – perhaps you said you had not received any – complaints directly as an organisation about the behaviour of your own campaigners. Do you have a code of conduct internally? Do your campaigners sign up to one?

Steph PRICE: We do not have a code of conduct. We have a campaigning guide, which is issued to all campaigners, clearly setting out what the *Electoral Act* provides. You know, we are a new party. In terms of instructing our campaigners as to what to do, we pulled out the *Electoral Act* and we wrote down on a guide, 'This is what the Act says you can do. Do these things and do them well. This is what the Act says you cannot do. Don't do these things, and if the VEC tells you you're doing those things, try not to do them.' That is as simple as it is. In terms of more broad instructions than that, the bulk of our campaigners participate in campaign training, and most campaigners are involved in an active and ongoing way in the course of a much longer period than the voting period itself. In this election we knocked on 190,000 doors, and that occurred through the work of the very people that campaigned for us during the voting period. So these people are involved in our organisation and furthering our politics for weeks and weeks and months and months before the election itself. Of course, as volunteers, members and candidates of the Victorian Socialists, they all have a commitment to fighting all forms of oppression. Certainly we have no concern about any racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic conduct from any of our members. Our policies are very clear on that.

Nathan LAMBERT: Thank you. How big is your membership these days?

Steph PRICE: I actually do not know.

Nathan LAMBERT: Is it something you could provide on notice?

Steph PRICE: I would have to check with the people that manage that.

Nathan LAMBERT: Hopefully they know.

Steph PRICE: Would the Labor Party? Are the Labor Party's membership numbers public?

Nathan LAMBERT: It is only because your submission talked to a change of politics that the Socialists represent – well, certainly that you purported to in your submission. I think it is true. I was just interested in the

Steph PRICE: I know we had 1000 volunteers on election day. I know that is public.

Nathan LAMBERT: I am just coming again to the topic we have all touched on. I took your earlier answers, but I suppose you and I saw it up close in the same context. You know, there is no doubt that the option, as a party, of taking a campaigning method that involves, as you said, long conversations is a method that tends to monopolise voters' attention on the way in. We saw this firsthand at the times when I chose to do it – and I have done it myself, so I am not criticising it as an approach. But if I choose to do it and you choose to do it, it becomes lose-lose and we both talk over each other all the way through, and then the poor voter just hears you and me raising our voices continuously. As a reaction to the 2022 campaign, it is possible that in 2026 we will have, understandably, perhaps four or five parties who decide that their approach is to seek to try and have long conversations, which will by necessity monopolise voters' attention. Do you worry at all about an end point whereby you end up with six or seven people all with the same approach, where their organising method is fundamentally based on getting at least 3- or 4-minutes worth of a voter's time, thus adding up to needing half an hour's worth of conversation if that engagement is going to work properly?

Steph PRICE: I mean, to be honest I do not worry particularly about that because of the nature of our campaigners and their involvement in rank-and-file activity, as I say, in their communities, workplace and universities. It is the sort of thing that they do day in, day out talking to people. This is not the sort of thing that everybody else does day in, day out. We do not at all think that many other campaigners are as able to engage in conversations of that nature as we are. Having said that, we certainly do not seek to and cannot have those sorts of conversations with every voter. We are a minor party and the audience of people open to voting for us is not a majority, so we would not be having those conversations with anything near a majority of electors. We are looking for left-wing people that are disillusioned with what is on offer from the major parties, turning up to vote because you are required to and looking for something different. We are not seeking only to talk to people about what to do today in terms of voting for our candidates. We are hoping to find people to involve in our project more broadly, to involve in their union, to involve in activism in their community. So we will continue to have those conversations, and as I say, it is not just about election day for us.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, understood. I might put it to you briefly in the cause of good policy that you might not be the only party with those sorts of collective organising approaches, but I take your point. Can I put to you a thing that was said to me that I did not witness firsthand – I want to make that very clear – but it was put to me, and I am just interested in your response. It is said that when someone approaches the booth wearing a headscarf Victorian Socialists change the script they are using to one that involves the Israel–Palestine conflict. Is that something you are aware of? Is there any truth to that allegation?

Steph PRICE: I mean, we do not have a script. Our approach is to talk to people about the politics that might be relevant to them based on what our policies are –

Nathan LAMBERT: With respect, it was a very consistent script amongst your campaigners in Preston. There was a script.

Steph PRICE: I mean, we certainly do not have a script, but I do not think it would be –

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I also witnessed that exact script.

Steph PRICE: One of the things that many voters in the north – and I am not familiar with the west, but certainly in Broadmeadows and potentially in Preston – is our position on Israel–Palestine, so yes, we –

Nathan LAMBERT: I am not denying that at all, but just asking if there is any sort of party-wide approach that is specifically having that conversation with people with headscarves?

Steph PRICE: There is absolutely no script. There is no direction, but we do find significant support for our policy in the north.

Nathan LAMBERT: If I can, Chair, on a similar question – and this is really just a general view on, sort of, truth in politics, but again I am just being direct about the situation; we were there – there was a standard line to many, many voters that I heard ad nauseam that, ‘Have you heard of the Victorian Socialists? In the upper house there’s five spots available. Two will go to Labor, two will go to Liberal, the last will be between us and the far right.’ Now, I picked that because it is actually a less loaded sort of thing perhaps even than the previous question. But just as a really basic thing, as people at this table know, that is not actually a true statement about the nature of politics in the north, where, with of course respect to the various parties at the table, you kind of cannot really explain it without mentioning the Greens, who were very likely to win that seat. So there was a thing there being said time and time again that was really a distortion of the truth. Do you have a view on the need for people to be truthful with electors as they are coming into the voting booths?

Steph PRICE: I would say that the statement that it is likely that Labor will have two seats, the Liberals will have one and the Greens will have one and the last is up for –

Nathan LAMBERT: No, the statement was two Labor, two Liberal.

Steph PRICE: That statement would never have been said, because it is factually incorrect and it makes no sense.

Nathan LAMBERT: All right. Well, it certainly was said a lot, but perhaps that is our point of disagreement. I think I have exhausted my 5 minutes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I will go to Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERSANK: Thanks, Chair. Apart from a sort of strange feeling, having heard the description from the witness with regard to the circumstances on the ground, that I must have been at a different election, I think all of the questions that I might want to have pursued have been exhausted, so I will pass. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Vulin.

Emma VULIN: Hi. I was just going to touch on the how-to-vote cards and the registration requirement. The Act currently requires all election day how-to-vote cards to be registered by the VEC, but not how-to-votes used in pre-poll. From an environmental, logistical and efficiency perspective, what are the challenges with

existing requirements to register only election day how-to-vote cards, and in your view should there be a difference between election day cards and pre-poll cards?

Steph PRICE: I do not have much to say on this. This is not something that I have any dealings with. I am aware of some discrepancies in the Act between requirements for early voting and polling day itself which do not seem to make much sense. If there was some attempt to resolve that, that would make sense.

Emma VULIN: Okay. I think I will leave it there.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. Does anyone else have any other quick questions?

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, just a question, Steph, that we talked to some of the other parties about: obviously public funded is provided to parties. Tens of millions of dollars are provided. Collectively the public do not have a broad sense of what that spending looks like. Do you have a rough sense as an emerging party what for the Victorian Socialists are the key big buckets of spending that you feel you need to do?

Steph PRICE: I mean, as Treasurer I should have a lot to say about this, but the reality is I do the reporting to the commission. That is what I do. I do not make decisions about the spending, but based on what I can see happens in the accounts, it appears that the bulk of spending is in relation to materials, so how-to-votes. The number that you need to print is extraordinary, and it is extremely expensive. Paper is more expensive now than it ever has been in the past – election materials, so corflutes and the materials that you hand out in the course of doorknocking. As I say, for us doorknocking was a significant activity: 190,000 doors knocked. That is a lot of pieces of paper to be printed. That for us is the overwhelming bulk.

Nathan LAMBERT: Do you do opinion polling or focus groups?

Steph PRICE: No way – no money for that.

Nathan LAMBERT: Do you have a view on expenditure caps on a seat basis or on a lower house or upper house seat basis?

Steph PRICE: I think we are for expenditure caps. Perhaps I will take that on notice and, if I am wrong in that, return on that point.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, totally – probably on public funding generally, because I do not think it was picked up in your submission, but if you have got a view.

Steph PRICE: Another member of the party appeared before the independent board looking into that matter last week, so I would defer to whatever he said there, because that is his area. One thing that we thought worth pointing out was the absence of administrative funding for parties that do not have an MP. The additional and more recent disclosure requirements in relation to donations impose a significant administrative burden that we are not able to resource. Disclosures are handled by me in the evening after my kids go to bed, so we would prefer to be able to resource that appropriately.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, I think any of us who have done those disclosures late at night, after the kids, would agree. Thank you, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Cool. That allows me to bring this session to a close. Steph Price, thank you for coming to appear before the committee. All witnesses from all political parties involved in the 2022 election provide a really valuable insight to the committee and help guide our work in reviewing the 2022 Victorian state election, so thank you on behalf of the committee. The meeting is closed.

Witness withdrew.