

Tuesday 12 January 2010

COALITION PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL TO END BRUMBY ADVERTISING ABUSES

"I make it absolutely clear to the Parliament and the people of Victoria that we will not tolerate the sort of abuse of taxpayers' money that has been occurring in the funding of political advertisements under the government. We will introduce this legislation when in government. It will be the first piece of legislation we put through." - John Brumby, Legislative Assembly Hansard 8/3/1995

The Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition will introduce a private member's bill into the Victorian Parliament to end Labor's abuse of taxpayers' funds for self-promotion and other improper government advertising.

The *Political Advertising Bill 2010*, to be introduced in the February sitting of Parliament, will seek to end the Brumby Government's record abuse of taxpayers' funds for inappropriate party-political advertising.

The Coalition's Bill is based on legislation that was announced – but never introduced – by John Brumby when he was Opposition Leader in 1995.

Fifteen years ago John Brumby boasted of his staunch opposition to taxpayer-funded party-political advertising, but since coming to government he has spent unprecedented amounts of taxpayers' funds promoting himself and his government.

In just one three-year period the government spent a massive \$520 million on advertising.

The Coalition's bill will end this abuse by establishing an Independent Government Advertising Review Panel to oversee, scrutinise and approve taxpayer-funded advertising.

This panel will ensure taxpayer-funded government advertising campaigns are not party-political and do not inappropriately use taxpayer funds to promote the government of the day.

The panel will include retired members of the judiciary, senior academics, and former public sector auditors. The panel will independently review government advertising to ensure campaigns would not be party-political and were not excessive.

When he announced his Political Advertising Bill in 1995, John Brumby claimed that the legislation would:

- *'stop any government using taxpayers' money for politically biased and untruthful advertising'* (Source: John Brumby Press Release 8/3/1995)
- *ensure 'taxpayers' money should be used for schools, hospitals and other community services not for politically biased and misleading advertising'* (Source: John Brumby Press Release 8/3/1995)
- *provide 'another reason, apart from the many others, for voting for Labor. It is that we will put in place the Political Advertising Bill, legislation that will safeguard the interest of the Victorian people.'* (Source: John Brumby, Legislative Assembly Hansard, 8/3/2005)
- *'put an end to the practice of governments misusing taxpayers' money to fund blatantly political party advertisements.'* (Source: John Brumby, Legislative Assembly Hansard, 8 March 2005)

Fifteen years later and not only has the Bill never been introduced but every one of John Brumby's grand statements has been revealed as fraudulent empty posturing.

In 1995, John Brumby announced a series of changes that would be in his Political advertising Bill, including:

- *'to ensure public authorities do not disseminate government advertisements which are politically partisan';*
- *'to ensure that public authorities do not disseminate government advertisements which have the capacity to influence public support for a political party';*
- *'to ensure public authorities do not disseminate government advertisements which vilify people';*
- *'to encourage public authorities to advertise their services to the Victorian people in a fair, truthful and politically unbiased manner';* and
- *'to ensure public authorities do not directly or indirectly affect the political opinions of Victorians, especially during election periods.'* (Source: Legislative Assembly Hansard, 8 March 1995)

In addition Mr Brumby pledged *'we will introduce this legislation when in government. It will be the first piece of legislation we will put through'*. Instead, after more than a decade no legislation has been introduced, and the abuse of taxpayer funds for political advertising is more flagrant than ever.

Policy

The Coalition will now include all John Brumby's 1995 proposed reforms into the *Political Advertising Bill 2010*.

In 2010, Victorians cannot turn on their TV without the Brumby Government boasting about itself, yet Victorians are struggling with record violent crime, transport and road chaos and disastrous shortages of hospital beds and vital welfare services as a direct result of Labor's incompetence.

Recent ads have promoted the government's performance on transport when our public transport system is failing, education when our schools are broken-down and hospitals that haven't even been built.

I agree completely with John Brumby's 1995 statements about ending the flagrant abuse of taxpayers' funds and call on John Brumby to support the Coalition's Bill which he committed to in Opposition and failed to introduce in government.

John Brumby's failure to introduce the Bill which in Opposition he claimed was so important shows that he cannot be trusted.

John Brumby clearly had no intention of honouring his commitments in 1995 and he is now taking millions of dollars of taxpayer funds for advertising to promote himself and his government.