

VIEW FROM CANBERRA



August 2016

BIC Conference a MUST DO as the Political Dust settles

In my last BIC Column I said that if you were ever thinking of attending a BIC Conference this is the year.

As the dust has settled after a long week of counting of ballot papers, the Coalition has formed Government and will no doubt continue to support the cities and public transport policies they went to the election on. If you want to hear about it firsthand, then you need to be in Perth, Nov 6-9 for the BIC Conference.

There are a few interesting aspects of this federal election that will make for interesting times ahead. We have continuity in the Government and Opposition with all of the relevant Ministers and shadow ministers and portfolios remaining the same. At the same time we have the swing to smaller alternative parties such as Pauline Hanson in Queensland and Nick Xenophon in South Australia and a swing away from major parties in the primary vote, and this includes the Greens.

It is clear that many in the electorate have sent a message to the major parties that they want to be listened to on local issues. The big picture issues are important, but you need to talk to the folk on the ground. Look at the Nationals who increased their representation in the parliament by running a localised grassroots campaign.

The other interesting factor from this election is, what it means for future state and territory elections and the major parties?

The Northern Territory has an election in August and the ACT in October. In the ACT the hot local issue is public transport. There is a great deal of community opposition to the ACT light rail and with the Liberal party opposing the light rail, it is the ACT Libs best opportunity to win the Territory election in a very long time.

For the larger states it might be a different story. Mike Baird, the NSW Premier who up until now has been the previously untouchable man, the golden boy of Australian politics, may just have a bit of a harder task ahead of him after the results in the federal election in Western Sydney.

Colin Barnett, the Premier in WA seems to be “on the nose” in the electorate. The tip before the federal election was that he will not get up in the next WA election. So how is he looking after it? If the votes moving away from major parties flows over from the federal election to state elections, it can't be good for Barnett.

Daniel Andrews caused no end of drama in Victoria for his federal colleagues with the Victorian government's handling of the volunteer fire fighters issue taking all the steam out of the ALP's federal election “cut through” in that state. Once again a local issue impacting on the major parties.

In South Australia, it has not been surprising to see Premier Jay Wetherill already cozying up to Nick Xenophon in joint media conferences in the week after the federal election. This could always back fire of course with Xenophon picking up more seats in the next state election and maybe becoming a king maker in the SA Parliament.

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In Queensland the whole thing is already on a knives edge with the government relying on one member to support them, but there is no doubt as was the case in the Brisbane City Council election recently, public transport will be a key election issue in the next Queensland election.

My point is that cost of living and transport are evidently core local issues, and with transport taking up such a large percentage of the average family household budget, we are seeing unprecedented investment into public transport infrastructure in most states and territories by the federal and state governments. Investment that is unprecedented in the history of the nation.

The impact of this federal election and the protest vote against the major parties to look at more local issues will only strengthen the major parties resolve to deliver real on the ground benefits in the form of infrastructure and services.

It can only be a win - win for public transport and bus, a very good reason to get to the BIC Conference and see where your business is heading from federal and state Ministers and senior decision makers and industry leaders.

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