

A VOTE FOR JUSTICE

CANDIDATES' SURVEY RESPONSES FOR ACT ELECTION 2016

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Housing

Questions for candidates

1. What role do you think that the ACT Government can play in this area?
A: It can provide more public housing in a structured manner to provide for the particular needs of each group. Emergency housing needs more units, as does mental disability housing, including Downs Syndrome adults for example. Each field of public housing needs to be increased in appropriate ways for each group. For example housing that is in a complex that may take up a block for example may provide for homeless and for people suffering depression. Fully catered rooms, self-catered rooms, etc. Christchurch in New Zealand handles this quite well for example.
2. Is accelerating the rate of construction or acquisition of public housing a viable and appropriate part of the solution?
A: Yes. The money could come from savings by not proceeding with the tram without being noticed, or in any case needs to be Budgeted with a forward plan to include the impact of the growing population.
3. If so, what level of commitment will you give in this area?
A: I would give strong commitment. I would need advice from not-for-profit organisations and the public housing area of government to determine the most sensible path – but quickly.
4. What other measures are you prepared to take?
A: Ensure that sound psychological and medical advice is taken on how to best provide for each field and the various levels. We need to develop a clear understanding of best practice in a practical way so we can get on with it, and have a path for extension into the future.
5. What incentives are being provided by the ACT Government to encourage the private sector to invest in new developments of social housing in partnership with the ACT government?
A: Don't know. I do support joint effort, where each takes responsibility for high standards of practise, and sets measures in place to ensure this happens.

Mental health

Questions for candidates

1. What steps do you think that the incoming government can take to improve mental health services for people experiencing mental illness?
A: We do need to put more professional effort into diagnosing and treating mental illness in the jail. This should also be associated with much more expert development of literacy and numeracy courses in the jail, so the inmates have a realistic chance of getting a job on release, and being able to look forward to a normal life free of the huge stress involved in dealing with the world.
2. How might the community become more engaged in issues of mental health?
A: Some government support could reap excellent dividends in strategic support of not-for-profit organisations wanting to improve mental health support and housing.
3. Do you support the allocation of extra resources to ensure that prisoners of the Alexander Maconochie Centre receive the mental health services they need and that, as far as possible, the prison environment protects mental health?
A: Yes, certainly.
4. What strategies are in place to meet the growing demand from members of the community with mental health issues who are not eligible for the NDIS?
A: Not enough it seems. Decades ago the Americans assessed that more people were suffering from mental illnesses than physical illnesses. In Australia we seem to just hope that people will pull their socks up. We need to employ more professionals in this important field.

The right to life

Questions for candidates

1. Do you consider that the ACT's current laws on abortion and human cloning adequately protect human life?

A: I do not know. I think the two matters are totally separate. People claiming "right to life" to stop women and girls terminating unwanted pregnancies are in fact ensuring, that is forcing, the death of mothers. Those women not wealthy enough to arrange a termination with all the proper medical facilities will in many cases go to back yarders in desperation. Some will die from this and some will have their health ruined for life. It is time the Roman Catholic Church recognised this reality. The Pope very sensibly and decently on leaving the Philippines noted that it is not necessary to breed at maximum pace. A good beginning. 100 years ago the world population was about 2 billion. Now it is about 7 billion. This is clearly madness. People have become a plague on the earth. This is not Godly in any sense. The Roman Catholic Church has caused the desperate impoverishment of all of Central and South America through its out-dated primitive policies of encouraging maximum reproduction rates. At the same time, starting a few hundred years ago (nothing to do with Jesus Christ) the Catholic Church forced all its direct employees to not breed at all. This is arguably an inhumane policy to save money, which is causing widespread mis-treatment of children. There is no merit in this policy.

Nuclear transfer in human reproductive eggs is not a matter for the church. It is the only way, just developed, to enable some people to have children without the child's early death and suffering from genetic disorders. The church has no place interfering in this. The "cloning" fervour in the church is a misplaced waste of energy. Appropriate civil laws will be developed. The church should use its energies more usefully helping to sort out the poverty and hardship it has caused for example.

2. If not, how would you like to see them changed?

A: The laws in this area need to develop carefully, taking account of science and humanity towards people caught up in such unhappy and sometimes desperate circumstances.

3. How would you protect children in utero when their mother is assaulted?

A: If you mean the mother has been impregnated against her will, then she should be helped to have the accident terminated as soon as possible.

4. Do you think that existing services give sufficient support to women who have an unexpected pregnancy, especially under difficult circumstances?

A: It is probable that more could be done, but what is being done is in the right direction. The church, in the face of the high cost of rearing and educating children, has failed dismally in this area (plenty of horrific information coming forward in Ireland for example). Forcing the women caught up in these circumstances to subjugate their lives to this cost brings no credit on the church, where it has clearly failed.

5. Do you support existing legislation to prevent euthanasia and, if not, what changes would you like to see?

A: Careful changes should be made in the direction of people having the right to choose to end their lives when irreversible pain and suffering are involved.

6. What do you propose to improve palliative care services?

A: I don't know what may be appropriate in that field.

The justice system

Questions for candidates

1. Do you think that the penalties currently prescribed in ACT law are too severe, too lenient or about right?

A: Penalties are a vexed issue where the courts attempt to give every benefit of doubt and cause least damage to people's lives, but in some cases they are not sufficiently aware of the criminal culture to deal adequately with repeat offenders, and some people caught for the first time.

2. Are the needs of crime victims receiving enough attention and, if not, what might be done to address them?

A: The perpetrators need to be brought face to face with the victims and their families under well-developed professional supervision. Financial payments are not really appropriate, unless robbery is the crime, but medical support (mental and/or physical) may be useful and appropriate.

3. Is rehabilitation given sufficiently high priority at the Alexander Maconochie Centre?
A: No. Literacy, numeracy and mental health are key matters that need development at the jail. On the other hand less comfort is appropriate for serious offenders. Work skills and ethics need development. Smoking and drug addictions need to be treated. I oppose needle exchange. We have a duty of care to ensure they don't get into the jail, along with drugs, so addicts are treated rather than supported in their addiction.
4. Do you see a place for restorative justice in the penal system?
A: Yes.
5. If so, would you support allocating resources for this purpose?
A: Yes.
6. What do you propose to reduce the disproportionate rate of Indigenous imprisonment?
A: People with some Indigenous background should be treated like all other people, not as special, or freaks. As much should be expected of them as of anyone else. Encouraging ideas of a separate culture is apartheid. They should be expected to attend school as children and develop their educations as all other children. Accepting that they start to drop out by 8 years old or so and begin the disastrous life of self-pity and expectations of special treatment and acceptance of bad behaviour does not do them or anyone else any favours. I have seen Indians in North Dakota who suffer all the same illnesses and dysfunctional lives because they live separately and through boredom go on to become over-weight, get Type II diabetes and kidney failure just as people of Indigenous background who choose not to participate in modern society in a full and responsible manner. In the jail they are a group that needs literacy and numeracy and work training, and probably mental health attention.
7. As employment is a key determinant of recovery and reduced recidivism, what strategy will you support to increase employment outcomes and options for people leaving incarceration?
A: They need some additional mentoring and if necessary travel support to suitable work opportunities, so they are able to adjust into normal working lives.

Education

Questions for candidates

1. Are you satisfied with the evidence base on the distribution of education resources by geographic area?
A: No. I support the Gonski approach of funding on a needs basis, with the best range of professional expertise applied to help all children to as closely approach at least average as possible.
2. Do you think that school students from low-income families are receiving a fair share of the ACT Government's education dollar?
A: No.
3. If not, where do you think that the biggest shortfalls are occurring?
A: As the Gonski report found.
4. How might the incoming government address these issues?
A: Take more precise interest in identifying and funding the support needed. See EDUCATION in my policies at www.iancoombesforginninderra.com
5. How will you respond to the recent review's recommendation that more funds be provided to ensure that every school has enough counsellors to support early intervention in relation to students' mental wellbeing?
A: Support.
6. As the second highest provider of school education in the ACT, do you agree that Catholic Education should be included in the planning of land release and accorded priority in the allocation of land for schools in new growth areas?
A: Not particularly. I support a first class public school system. I am disappointed by the relative failure of the public school system over the last 30 or more years. That needs priority. That said, my father was Catholic and our grand-daughter attends Francis Xavier.

Gambling

Questions for candidates

1. Do you support a steady reduction in the number of poker machines in the ACT?
A: The shift by governments in Australia over the last several decades to encourage gambling as a tax source is reprehensible. It used to be a role of government to protect people from gambling. I support reduction in poker machines, but not by robbing them from clubs. The foreign owner of the casino is not likely to contribute as much funds from poker machines back into the community as the not-for-profit clubs.
2. If so, do you think that the current rate of reduction is adequate?
A: Don't know. I would look into it should I be elected.
3. How do you propose to deal with the revenue losses involved for the ACT Government and with the impact on community and sporting organisations?
A: Governments need to give a lot more consideration to the voluntary contributions to our society by not-for-profit organisations. There may be some new joint actions appropriate, which may mean more funds out of the Budget.
4. How do you expect trading of poker machine licences from clubs to the Casino to impact the ACT?
A: I do not support it at this stage. I would be guided more by the not-for-profit sector than a foreign casino owner.
5. Do you consider that the ACT Government should support Commonwealth initiatives to reduce the extent of problem gambling on poker machines?
A: Probably. The Commonwealth is so silly on so many fronts at present that I would need to know more.
6. How do you expect employment levels in the ACT will be affected by a reduction in poker machines?
A: I recognise there will be some reduction. However, I think we need to give a lot more attention at government level to forward planning to make the ACT increasingly self-reliant through modern industries. That certainly includes tourism based on other than gambling. The employment could easily be shifted to better jobs in that way.

Climate change

Questions for candidates

1. What is your position on the reality or otherwise of human-induced global warming?
A: It is very real and we need to move urgently to cut our pollution in all respects as far as science and consideration for others can enable us. NASA, CSIRO, UK Meteorological, US Oceanic and Aeronautical Administration, US Geological Survey are sensible sources of information on this matter.
2. How do you view the ACT's target of a 40 per cent reduction (of 1990 levels) in carbon [dioxide] emissions by 2020?
A: Barely adequate. See my website www.iancoombesforginninderra.com
3. How might the incoming ACT Government encourage households and businesses to take greater responsibility for their own emissions?
A: Solar hot water systems on their roof, use of modern wood burning heaters, solar PV cells on the roof, insulation of houses.

Empowering Indigenous communities

Questions for candidates

1. How would you support the Indigenous initiative after-school program, Solid Sista's and Brotha's?
A: Don't know, but I would be interested in learning more about it.
2. What is your position on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in our education system?
A: Where they are still speaking their native languages in the north and central Australia, then there is a role for using the languages in school, as they are also taught English.
3. How would you support restorative justice initiatives in the ACT, particularly the Circle Sentencing initiatives in NSW? Does this have application in the ACT?
A: Don't know. Certainly the original native punishments are not generally applicable. They have failed in the north of Australia because they are too harsh for modern people to bring themselves to apply. It appears that there is merit in Circle Sentencing in many circumstances.

Equity in the economy

Questions for candidates

1. How would you apply the 'preferential option for the poor' to the vulnerable, those who are marginalized in society, including unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression, in public policy?

A: I have a good economics degree and an unusually wide range of work experience, and mixing at all levels of society. As I said earlier the church needs to urgently adjust its attitude to pregnancy termination, otherwise it will be increasingly irrelevant to the realities of life. The rest I am strongly supportive of. See my website www.iancoombesforginninderra.com

2. How would you enhance equity through the distribution of capital, goods, and access to services throughout the Territory's economy?

A: We need to address the power of large corporate bodies in specific ways, for example legislate penalties for people being kept waiting on the telephone and in banks. This is a transfer of time and wealth from the ordinary people to large corporations and their wealthy executives. We also need to pressure the Commonwealth to tax the wealthy and corporate sectors in accord with the rest of us. We need to look at how we can raise taxes from those sectors with the remaining taxing powers the Territory has.

3. What will you do to increase fairness in the ACT economy, particularly in regard to taxation or welfare, to afford equal life chances regardless of identity, to provide all citizens with a basic and equal minimum of income, goods, and services or to increase funds and commitment for redistribution?

A: Use my understanding of economics at all times to properly assess the impacts of each proposed change to ensure equity and fairness.