

InToWin Australia - “A Platform for Participation in Improved Political Performance”

CHAPTER 4 : We see the problems – what’s the solution?

Step 2: Control the purse strings

P J O’Rourke, an American political satirist, explains the importance of fiscal control. *“Giving money and power to government is like giving whisky and car keys to teenage boys.”* This might be funny if it weren’t so true!

The journey to “Oztopia” must include applying the brakes to Federal government spending. No matter who has been in charge of the Commonwealth budget over the past decade or so, they have proven themselves incapable of maintaining fiscal competence and restraint. Worse than this, they have evaded responsibility. I challenge you to find any politician who will claim any sense of ownership of the \$750 billion in government debt. To paraphrase Scott Adams, of “Dilbert” fame - *“Politicians are like cats in a litter box. They instinctively shuffle things around to conceal what they’ve done.”*

Solution 2: Establish some non-negotiable parameters within which politicians and their governments must operate - balanced budgets and debt ceilings should be the rule, not the exception.

- (i) Set in place a budget charter that does not allow governments to plan for a budget deficit in any year, without approval by a public referendum or “independent of government” authority.
- (ii) Revisit the debt ceiling on government borrowing, and ensure it cannot be exceeded without approval by a public referendum or “independent of government” authority.
- (iii) Subject all proposed large-scale government infrastructure projects to “independent of government” cost/benefit analyses and public scrutiny.
- (iv) Overhaul Federal / State government relations, to establish single points of accountability and responsibility for key public services and infrastructure - eliminating inefficient overlaps and double handling.

Step 3: Accept responsibility

Saidi Mdala, from Botswana, is a personal development coach, author and inspirational speaker - *“The worst thing that can happen to you as a young person, is to refuse to grow up. You refuse to grow up when you believe that someone else must take responsibility for your life and life circumstances.”*

Saidi’s thoughts on a child’s journey to adulthood could apply equally to societies. To support a reduction in government intervention, we, the public,

must grow up. We must stop asking governments to solve all our problems. This cultural shift will be a challenge. We have become used to the government as supplier, the government as reviewer, the government as regulator, and the government as scapegoat. Logical argument alone will not be enough to cause the change. As the writer, motivational expert and uber salesman Dale Carnegie so clearly articulated - *"When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices, and motivated by pride and vanity"*.

Solution 3: Must be a step for each individual to make – it is not one that I can proscribe.

By way of example, I will simply offer up my own pledges –

- (a) I will not ask the local council to talk to my neighbour about his barking dog – I will approach him, calmly and articulately, myself (perhaps with a bottle of wine in hand!)
- (b) I will not complain about the lack of CBD parking and the amount of cars on the road, when there is a perfectly good public transport system on my doorstep.
- (c) I will not seek an age pension or an unemployment benefit whilst I am able to fund my own semi-retirement.
- (d) I will not ask any government department what it is doing about home care packages for my elderly parents – our family will arrange funding and resolve assistance needed.
- (e) I will let the federal government know that it should stop trying to implement policies designed to keep us all equally happy all of the time. I may refer them to the futility of equalisation, explained so eloquently by Dr. Samuel Johnson, the prolific 18th century English writer who literally wrote the Dictionary of the English language – *"It is better that some should be unhappy than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality."*

You get the drift – you can make your own pledges. Society and its governing bodies cannot eradicate every citizen's ills, nor meet every citizen's demands - nor should they attempt to.