

matters that count to Australian women

As we head into our 47th federal election, we should pause and consider why women are still vastly underrepresented in our national parliament, and how this bears out in the everyday.

The concerns of Australian women, including the serious economic inequities affecting women, are consistently pushed to the margins within a masculine and combative political culture.

We know this from our history.

We know it from our life experience.

We saw it a year ago in politically managed responses to sexual assault and harassment allegations in our national parliament. We see it now in the frenzied macho campaigning dominated by spin and a media pack hunting for blood.

Simmering under the media radar is great voter unease, especially amongst women.

This is a line-in-the-sand election.

Disquieted by the neglect of issues close to their hearts and minds, women appreciate that while issues of economic management and national security are national priorities, so too are many significant others.

Throughout our entire existence, the Victorian Women's Trust has sought out every possible opportunity to encourage and support women's engagement in our democratic processes.

Since March, in keeping with this tradition, we rolled out an election initiative called *matters that count*.

This initiative has demonstrated that women care deeply about the unrelenting violence and abuse towards women and children, Indigenous injustice, the economic inequalities affecting many working women in the care sector, the difficulty for many in securing a roof over their heads, climate change, the urgent need for better childcare and early learning systems, the cruel treatment of asylum seekers, and the need for integrity and anti-corruption measures.

These are matters which go to the soul of our nation, the prosperity of our economy and the health of our democracy.

They will only be resolved for the better by people entering the next federal parliament all being willing to advocate and work for:

- **Significant investment to stop men's violence towards women and children**
- **A constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to our national parliament**
- **Wage justice for women working in aged care and childcare sectors**
- **Affordable housing for women to stop their slide into homelessness**
- **Serious, concerted action on climate change**
- **An affordable and high-quality childcare and early learning system**
- **Ending the cruel treatment of asylum seekers**
- **A strong and effective anti-corruption commission**

The fact that Australian women are still underrepresented in our political life is something we must continue to address across our democracy if we want a fairer and safer future for the next generations of women.

In the short term, however, this lack of gender parity does not rule out women giving voice to what they see are matters important to our society and economy; making their own assessments as to where their candidates stand on these matters; and holding their elected representatives to account for their performance on these matters over the term of the next parliament.

Women's engagement in Australia's political life and culture is critical to our future.

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