

28 June 2010

An Open Letter to the Prime Minister from Australia's secular parents

Dear Prime Minister

The Australian Secular Lobby wishes to extend our congratulations to you on attaining such a high and vitally significant office with your new role as both our Prime Minister, and our first female Prime Minister.

Much will be expected of you, as you transition your Government from those policies dominated by Mr. Rudd's world-view, to a Government that better reflects your own world-view.

Australian electors were well aware of Mr. Rudd's close affinity with evangelical Christianity when he was elected in 2007, but many did not expect ALP policies to be quite so dominated, and driven, by demands from the evangelical lobbyists and church leaders, as they sought to fundamentally reshape Australian public schools through the Liberal Party's National School Chaplaincy Program, the NSCP.

The Australian Secular Lobby certainly expects you to re-confirm the ALP's traditional concern for the poor and the disadvantaged and to uphold those longstanding and cherished Australian values to be found deep in our egalitarian underpinnings.

This egalitarianism was threatened, as you know, by John Howard and Tony Abbott's industrial legislation, WorkChoices, now thankfully banished to the archives of poorly conceived and applied Commonwealth legislation, thereby saving Australian working families from unwarranted assaults on their hard-won rights and reasonable expectations.

Our supporters include many hardworking parents, who know the value of hard work, and pass that on to their children by living example. They value respect, including the value of respecting other people's deeply held beliefs. They all do-their-bit within the communities in which they live, right around our nation-state.

But they are very concerned that the school chaplaincy program, designed to inject public schools with 'moral values', according to Tony Abbott's Liberal Party, was personally extended by Kevin Rudd.

This was done without any checks or Government appraisals, without asking parents in public schools what they felt, without any policing of what our supporters insist were nothing less than 'dodgy' applications for funding, back in 2006 and 2007.

Our supporters work in factories and farms, in mines and mills, in offices, in tourism and retail, in classrooms and hospitals. They set their alarms, and go to work, care for their children, impart solid secular values that respect and accommodate the views of others. They do play by the rules and expect religious leaders and well-paid lobbyists to do so too. They also expect strong, independent, unbiased, non-partisan secular leadership for a secular nation-state, for the nation they so love and respect.

Beyond party politics, so necessary for the democratic running of our nation-state, the compass that sustains our supporters is the one that should strike a chord with all of us. Those of faith, and those of none, should understand what particular value 'being secular' offers to us all in Australia, as we send our troops off to war to fight against the totalitarian and theocratic ambitions of others: the all-embracing security of a secular nation-state allows us to live together, peacefully, with those of different views, in our own neighbourhood.

Being a secular nation-state, and being seen to be a secular nation-state, is an issue of high national security in a globalising world fraught with religious-inspired conflict. This is a Human Security issue and a Human Rights issue also.

Prime Minister, the Australian Secular Lobby requests that you initiate an urgent investigation into the structure, the running, the true purpose and the reality of the National School Chaplaincy Program. This must start with the eight-page DEEWR application process, and the surprising 100 percent tick-a-box success rate, even from schools where parents have complained to DEEWR, and to the ASL, that the consultation process was either flawed, or completely non-existent.

Created by John Howard for base political advantage and continued on the personal whim of Mr. Rudd, at the behest of a noisy and unrepresentative minority of ambitious and divisive evangelical lobbyists, this Liberal Government policy has now run its course.

In our once secular public schools, there is now no escape from the presence and influence of potent, raw, unfettered religious ambition, or from the evangelising and proselytising of church recruiters.

Our public schools should not serve as 'missionfields' for any religion keen to promote their exclusive message, to tell our children they have no 'Hope', to suggest our supporters live in a 'moral vacuum' and that our public school teachers cannot be trusted.

Prime Minister, please apply your new authority tear down this outdated Liberal Party policy that Mr. Kevin Rudd so happily endorsed and encouraged. Fund those schools who need qualified professional school counsellors with just that, qualified professional school counsellors.

Erect a wall of separation between the religious proselytising ambitions of church recruiters, and our children, the students who provide the purpose our once secular public schools have always existed for, the promotion of democratic, egalitarian and secular Australian values.

These same secular values allow all within our multi-cultural and multi-faith (and none) nation-state to co-exist and prosper. Those who work to actively oppose a secular state, also work to oppose egalitarianism, democracy, and our shared Australian values.

Yours sincerely,

The Australian Secular Lobby,

including all of the many secular parents, students, citizens, electors, teachers, nurses, doctors, truck drivers, politicians, mine workers, retail workers, trade unionists, retired people, journalists, executives, bankers, entrepreneurs' and the many millions of unidentified people who all expect to be able to co-exist with religion, without having it imposed upon them and their children, particularly by the Commonwealth of Australia, in a secular nation-state.