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# **The Great Debate:**

**“Elected governments – federal, state and local – should decide on community priorities because the only place to influence policy is through elections”**

Communities in Control Conference  
Melbourne, 5 June, 2007

**Adjudicator: The Hon. Joan Kirner**

Former Premier of Victoria, Chair, Ministerial Advisory Council for  
Victorian Communities

*For:*

**Anne Dunn**

Chair of the Australian government’s Regional Women’s Advisory  
Council, community arts expert

**Waleed Aly**

Leader on multicultural issues & spokesperson for the Islamic Council  
of Victoria

*Against:*

**John Roskam**

Executive Director, Institute of Public Affairs

**Karyn Walsh**

President, Queensland Council of Social Services

**Note:** This was a light-hearted debate. The views expressed in this transcript do not necessarily reflect those held by the speakers

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## **Joan Kirner:**

Thank you for inviting me back again to take part in one of the things about community I really enjoy, and that's debate – debate and dialogue.

We're going to run this with normal debating rules but with a bit of humour thrown in. Each speaker will speak for 10 minutes and then there will be a summing up by one or they might share the summing up at the end.

It's a pleasure to be introducing this debate, and I have to say I was rapt with the topic: "Elected government – federal, state and local – should decide on community priorities because the only place to influence policy is through elections."

Now, be very careful how you decide this debate – which you will get to do at the end by a show of hands, or if it's too close by standing in your places (I won't ask you to divide) – because I've got a feeling that if you decide in the affirmative that not only myself but the majority of us will have wasted our lives. But of course I wouldn't want to influence the debate. I do understand though why Anne – or Madame Rose, as she is known today – thought she needed to dress up for the occasion; she has to attract some attention to her line in the debate.

I've spent 45 years, it's horrible to add it up isn't it, working with the community sector, hopefully never *on* the community sector, and working in the community. In the last couple of years I've been able to do that in a special kind of way, bringing the wisdom and the failures that I've been through with my brothers and sisters in the community sector and in the government sector and in the business sector, and actually going out on behalf of the current government, first Minister Thwaites and now Minister Batchelor, to listen to communities and ask what's working in empowering communities and what isn't, and what do they think we, not the government, we should be able to do about it. Hence the recent Social Inclusion report, which I'm very pleased to say

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is now with the Minister and hopefully will be with you when the Minister determines so.

So now I have the great title of Victorian Community Ambassador. I like that. It means I've got a job and not a detailed job specification. It's been fantastic – people have been so welcoming. And what I've seen is so many of the things that Angela Glover Blackwell was talking about actually happening in our communities. This is not really a surprise to me, but it has moved on a lot from when I was active in the parents' movement.

These things sit with you and you can learn from them. For example, I went to a neighbourhood renewal at Morwell. The meeting was in one of the marvellous neighbourhood houses we have in Victoria, the underpinning of community infrastructure and action. I sat there and listened to why neighbourhood renewal had made a difference in their lives, or how they'd used neighbourhood renewal to make a difference in their lives. And at the end of it I asked, "Can we just run through what the real difference has been for you?" And one woman waited till last – she had said nothing else in the whole meeting – and she said, "Before neighbourhood renewal I was a rent payer. Now I am a citizen." Now does that stick with you or not?

So that was one of the first experiences I had. The second one was at Rupanyup with Denis Moriarty who works at Our Community and is my deputy at the Advisory Committee on Victorian Communities. That town was going out backwards, and they couldn't get any funding to assist them because all that was available at the time was matched funding, user support funding.

So they decided to do it themselves. They set up a Community Bank, which gave them a stream of income (not gave it to them, they had to work for it because the bank had closed). And then, horror of horrors, their hotel was about to close, the hotel which was the centre of community discussion.

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What did they do? They bought it. They decided to buy the pub; that is, the sporting club decided to buy the pub, with the assistance of the bank.

I could see how difficult it was for the community with drought and closing businesses etc. but do you know not once – not once – while we were there did they talk about problems. All they talked about was solutions. Nor did they ask government for money, which I thought was pretty silly, but anyway they didn't, though by the end of it I had managed to convince them to ask for a little bit of money, because you have to earn your keep going around Victoria.

Rupanyup was an eye-opener in terms of demonstrating an attitude which many of you have: that the solutions come from the community.

The third example comes out of the Wendouree Neighbourhood Renewal, where they had lost their corner shop. They have now set up, with one of the non-government bodies, a new corner shop which will be the grocery store, and hopefully they'll also be able to sow organic vegetables and sell them. The people there were so proud of what they'd done I couldn't get out of the shop, because I had to look at every single item they'd ordered.

And here's another example. Some of you will know the lovely Daphne Yarram, from down at Sale. Daphne said to me, "Have you heard about my latest venture?" And I said, "No, what is it?" She said, "It's my cup of tea project." I said, "Your cup of tea project? I'll be in that." She said, "No you can't be. You're not Indigenous."

I said, "OK. Can you invite me?" And she said, "Oh probably." I said, "What's it about?" She said, "It's about telling our stories. It's about going to our older people and bringing in our younger people, so that around a cup of tea we can share the stories. We're starting with the women and the girls and then we'll go to the blokes and the boys."

I asked her last Sunday week at the celebrations on the referendum how it was going. And she said, "Well, the idea of having the girls first

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didn't last long 'cause the blokes thought they were being short-changed."

And that made me think about how much you can teach us, the Indigenous people, because your wisdom, the stories you can tell about the people you know, the people that you meet, the people that you work with, the stories of your success and your difficulties, that's actually the basis of community change.

And then finally, one frustration, just one. My greatest frustration when I go out and listen to people is that we do not have an effective system for sharing our considerable knowledge and wisdom, successes and failures with each other. We all, including myself, tend to talk to ourselves because 1) that's all we have time to, and 2) we don't necessarily have a vehicle to talk to others.

And so I have to say I was inspired by Angela's presentation and I know Rhonda has been too. Because one way forward, surely, is policy – building on the role of the community to link our wisdom with the government's wisdom at any level and develop policy out of that.

I think there's a tendency these days to say, "Yes, we'll give you a grant, but the wisdom stays with us," and that's why you have to do 50 pages of compliance. Whereas in fact, we all have wisdom and the challenge is to share it in an effective way which makes us all feel valued – valued as people and valued in what we do. And I reckon if we did that, if we had that sort of PolicyLink system, we would see a much more impressive and revolutionary move to community change and community development.

I'd like to finish my introduction with one of my favourite cartoons from the Wizard of Id. I love the peasants in the Wizard of Id. I don't like the king's attitude to the peasants, but I certainly like the peasants. This cartoon is one that sticks with me because it happened when I was Premier – it happened in reality and in the cartoon. The adviser came in and said to me, "The peasants are revolting".

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The response in the cartoon was, “I know that”. My response is: “What took them so long?”

And that’s the story of the last 1½ days. If you are going to be revolting, as many of you said you will, then we’ve got to be brave enough to actually name what we’re revolting about, name what we see we need, name what we don’t like, name what we do like, and then name what we’re going to do about it. And I’m sure you’ll hear many of those ideas reflected in our debate.

And now to our first speaker, Madame Rose, commonly known as Anne Dunn but of course there’s nothing common about her.

Anne worked for a period of 23 years as a public servant in South Australia and the Northern Territory. And then we all delighted when she came here to work in local government as the CEO of the City of Port Phillip. And then she returned to consulting practice, working in a number of areas of facilitation and mediation and organisational development.

And she’s recently done the Creative Communities Scoping Study for the Australia Council, as well as the enquiry into the establishment for regional hubs for the Collection Council of Australia.

Anne chairs the Australian government’s Regional Women’s Advisory Council, is a director on the board of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and is a fellowship holder with the Australia Council.

Please welcome Anne Dunn, who will speak in the Affirmative.

### **Anne Dunn:**

The question, as presented to us, asks you to consider who should decide on community priorities, and suggests that the community should voice its view on policy through casting their vote, and then

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trusting elected governments to make the best decisions on behalf of the whole community.

An admirable proposition in my view.

I am in a unique position to enlighten you on this matter – I am on the streets every day so I know what people want, and I entertain a lot of politicians at night so I knew their strengths and weaknesses.

What is clear to me is that community priorities cannot be left to the community, who are completely driven by self-interest.

To get the best for the whole community, we need to put ourselves into the hands of people who have a higher view, who have a clear picture from the clouds on which they sit of what will be best for all of us.

Who better to rely on than those marvellous men and women who put their lives on hold, suffer great stress under huge workloads and risk their reputations for the public interest?

Now I know that some of you have been wavering in recent years about the intentions and interests of politicians, and I regret to say that many young people in the street are growing up with a complete lack of respect for our leaders.

This is our fault! We have set a very bad example:

- By complaining about their private lives (and I must say I think most of them need a couple of private lives just to stay sane);
- By endlessly grizzling about their pay and conditions (poor things haven't got a union or an AWA); and
- By doubting their motives.

These people sacrifice their own lives for us, yet we are breeding a generation of cynics in our young people. Have you considered where this might end?

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Frankly, if we are to end up without revered government, in a state of anarchy, I am not happy about putting my future into the hands of young people with the attention span of gnats, who are more interested in surfing than working.

I have been a working girl all my adult life and I think the future of this country is dependent on all of us agreeing to work (well, at least almost every day).

So here we are, each pursuing our own interests (some of those interests more productive than others) and we might seriously be suggesting that we should be allowed to set community priorities.

Let's look at some of those community priorities.

A large percentage of the population are not interested in having children – in the last 30 years, the number of single person households in Australia rose from 19% to 28%. Rather, people seek to pursue their own selfish happiness – a life priority that will lead to the extinction of the human race.

Most of the adult male population places a priority on cars – and fast ones at that – while it is clear to us all that the survival of the very air we breathe and the environment in which that air is produced will rely on all of us giving away our cars. This priority on cars will certainly lead to the extinction of the planet on which we live.

Food is an interesting priority for us – now we want more food, more variety, more fancy food, more food cooked by someone else, more fast food, more fatty food, more ethnic food, more more more food that will lead to obesity and early death.

Let me talk about water for a bit. The community places a priority on farmers using less water – terrible that farmers are so wasteful out there with the precious stuff when people in the cities have to live with restrictions and are so responsible with water use.

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However the complainers fail to recognise that every glass of chardonnay they drink has taken a precious 15 litres of water to produce it, every 8-ounce steak they lovingly consume has taken 5000 litres of water, and every slice of white bread 28 litres. Don't think the vegetarians are pure either – every cup of lettuce takes 11 litres of water, 1 kg of soybean 2000 litres and 1 kilo of dry wheat 750 litres.

Community priorities would cut water allocation to farmers so that in the end we had nothing to eat or drink. How useless is that?

Then there is our obsession with contact sport – contact that is violent, aggressive and creates heroes of the people who are the most violent and aggressive. What sort of priority is that?

What about a bit more of a priority on loving and a quite different form of human contact. I think there should be a bigger priority on that.

The community has placed a priority on home ownership – and look where that has led us. Now in Sydney it takes an average of \$500,000 to buy a dumpy small suburban house – impossible on an income of \$50,000 a year. What about money for food, clothes and family outings and activities – and how is a girl like me supposed to make a living in Sydney? This priority has resulted in families being forced to have two incomes just to survive.

Of course, when you really look at it you can see that community priorities cannot be set by the community. These priorities can only safely be in the hands of people who see the bigger picture.

The community has an exciting opportunity every few years to tell politicians what they want, vote for the people who promise to give it to them, and then to sit back and have safe, healthy, happy communities delivered to them through sensible policies developed by our politicians at all levels.

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It is time we became respectful of our governors, and taught our children to follow us in this. We cannot become a nation of knockers and yobbos with no real leaders.

This debate is really about values – mateship, a fair go for all, respect for each other and pride in our leadership.

So when I come back I would like you to join me in an anthem to our leaders.

**Joan Kirner:**

Thank you Rose. I won't flatter you with a lot of praise, but I notice it wasn't only the eyelashes that are false.

In the case against, John Roskam is going to speak next.

John, as most of you will know, is the Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs. It's just fantastic standing next to him and being, I hope, on the same side.

John is a fantastic person to listen to on the radio. Not only does he have an influential job, but he also has some highly respected appointments in the Australian research and political scene, including Executive Director of the Menzies Research Centre in Canberra.

He's also had positions as Chief of Staff to David Kemp, the former Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and as senior adviser to Don Hayward, Victorian Minister for Education in the first Kennett Government.

John is highly active in a number of areas of research and particularly in drawing to our attention the reality of Australian politics, the ideas behind it and the way it's implemented. So political theory and political practice and education policy are part of his wide areas of expertise.

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I ask you to welcome John Roskam leading the case against.

**John Roskam:**

Thank you, Joan. Rhonda said to Karyn and me five minutes ago before the debate started, “Be funny.” The only funny line that I know about government is the one about, “I’m here to help.”

Joan actually probably won’t remember this but we spoke, Joan and I, in October 1992, probably around October 6, 7 or 8, and I remember it pretty vividly because we had just come into government and we received a phone call and I took the call from the former Premier of Victoria. The Kennett Government had just been sworn in a few days earlier, and the former Premier was ringing the Education Minister because she was aware that over the weekend some school relocatables had burned down. The school wasn’t even in her electorate, but she was just ringing to make sure that in the transition to government we made sure that the department quickly dealt with this issue. I must say that it always impressed me that even though Joan had left government then, she didn’t stop caring. So it’s an honour to be here at this debate being chaired by Joan.

What Karyn and I are going to talk to you about is the fact that government can’t be trusted, most of the time gets it wrong and usually has no idea what it’s doing.

If we are talking about only allowing elected officials to decide our priority, as Joan said, right now most of us can go home. Fortunately none of us believes it.

I am, by and large, a believer in democracy. By and large, I think the Australian people get it pretty right when they make their decisions. I, by and large, think that the Australian people have a great degree of common sense, unless they’re unlucky enough to barrack for Collingwood. But not even Eddie McGuire has all of the abilities that we now demand from our public servants.

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What government relies upon is all of us making decisions. There's no such thing as government decisions – ultimately these are decisions of ourselves and of our communities and of the groups that we work with and our families and of civil society. The vote once every three or four years is merely a shallow reflection of the myriad things we do every day.

If we look at how governments determine priorities in reality, we'd know the sham of most government decision-making. Many of us have been involved in government and we know you never appoint a committee unless you know the answer first. And if you don't get the answer that you want, then you try, try and try again. If you don't get the answer you want, then you haven't been doing your job properly.

In the good old days there used to be a great degree of debate in federal government, and many of you would remember the old-fashioned model of government at the federal level issuing Green Papers, which were the big radical reform proposals. After a period of consultation there would be the White Paper, which was the government publishing its final decisions. After a while, most people realised what a joke this was, and there emerged a form of humour which asked, "How do you turn a Green Paper into a White Paper?" Well, actually, you simply photocopy it.

Once upon a time, government was easy, certainly easier than it is now. The great reform challenges of the seventies and eighties in the economic field were things that governments and ministers and advisers and public services could handle. The floating of the dollar, tariff reform, changes to the banking system were decisions simply, most of the time, made by a stroke of a pen.

But now the big social, educational, health, and welfare issues that we struggle with every day don't have one simple answer. They have a myriad of answers. Not one single one of us knows the answer to every problem, but we expect government to have the answers, and

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quite frankly, government doesn't have the answers. The answers rest with us.

Government is good at doing lots of things, but government is not good at handling diversity. Government is not good at handling difference. In a nursing home when people say they'd rather be served dinner at 6.30 rather than 5.00, most of the time the system can't handle it. Turn that into a system with tens of thousands of people into a model, and we see how the model breaks down.

Governments can't handle risk and the big issues of the future will deal with risk. Governments can't handle controversy, and they certainly can't handle peasants revolting.

I was fortunate enough to be at a housing commission estate a few weeks ago and I saw an example of how government doesn't like risk. There was a tenants' union that had a grant of a couple of hundred dollars, and that government grant of a couple of hundred dollars was audited by a Big Four accounting firm at a cost of at least \$4000. That's what government does.

I'm old fashioned. If we're talking about who we'd rather have to spend the money and decide on the priorities, I'd rather it was us than the government.

The IPA last year published a major discussion paper on reforms to mental illness services and physical disability services. As the paper revealed, over the last 10 years, spending on those services at the federal and state level has increased by more than \$3 billion, more than 70%. As we know, there have been dramatic improvements in funding for key social policy issues.

But if government thought these issues were as important as we all do, why are no outcomes measured? Why is there no knowledge of the value for money that we're getting by spending this huge amount of money and providing services for the most disadvantaged people in our community?

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What I've presented is what government actually does, what government is, and the weaknesses of government. What we have to decide in this debate is when it comes to the life decisions for ourselves and the people we care for, whether those decisions are going to be made by people in Spring Street and people in Canberra, or whether they're going to be made by us, ourselves.

Karyn and I believe that those decisions are too important to be left to anyone other than ourselves.

### **Joan Kirner:**

The gentleman on my left is Waleed Aly, and I reckon he has one of the toughest jobs in our community at the moment because he has to cope with the incipient racism of our community. And he deals with it in the most extraordinary fashion. He is passionate and he is fair. And there are times that I think, "Oh no, he's being too fair." (Can you be too fair?)

Recently he was re-elected to the Executive Committee of the Islamic Council of Victoria, which is the peak Islamic body of our state, providing the Council with his expertise in public affairs. He regularly comments on news and current affairs programs, and it's a joy when he's co-host of the Conversation Hour with Jon Faine on 774 ABC Melbourne.

In addition, Waleed is widely published in print and media, and his book, *People Like Us*, will be published in September.

In his professional life, Waleed is a commercial solicitor at Maddocks Lawyers Melbourne. I don't know if they ever see him, but that's his real job. And he still finds time to give generously to the community, undertaking inspiring roles such as Ambassador for the United Nations White Ribbon Day and Youth Leadership Delegate to the Future Summit in Melbourne in May 2005.

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As I said before, to me he only seems to have one fault, he barracks for the black and yellow rather than the black and red, which we all know is the team that's fought for Indigenous participation in football more than any other.

So Waleed, we welcome you to the microphone, for the Affirmative.

**Waleed Aly:**

Thanks for that introduction. I can't escape the feeling that our side of this debate's a little bit out-numbered, and I also can't escape the feeling there's something symbolic in the fact that the adjudicator is standing on the other side of the stage.

I guess there's some irony in the fact that I'm standing here arguing for the Affirmative as someone who is widely seen as a representative of a community organisation or indeed an entire community. What that means is that I'm speaking here today against self-interest. And that means that I must be right. That should be enough to decide the debate really! But you give a lawyer 10 minutes, you're going to get 10 minutes, so I'll keep going.

The reason I can stand here and argue against self-interest is that this debate is not really about communities at all. It mentions the word community in the title, but all of these things are distractions. Do not be fooled. This is really a debate, like everything else in politics, this is really a debate about Australian values – Australian values like secularism, like the free market. These are all uniquely Australian things, I'm sure you'll agree. But most of all it's about democracy.

I was outraged to hear John Roskam argue that he is actually someone who defends and cares about democracy. If that was the case, you'd be sitting over this side of the stage. The fact is, there is only one democratic outcome to this debate, and that is a vote for us. And I'll explain why. I want to get clear at the outset – that's exactly

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what's at stake here; not my pride, I don't need you to vote for me to make me feel good, I need you to vote for me to make *you* feel good.

Australian democracy is at stake today. What is under threat here is this fundamental principle that belies every democracy in the world, and Australian democracy, I think, more than any other, and that is the belief in the pure wisdom of the elected.

In the introduction Joan had some things to say about wisdom and she said that government has wisdom and people have wisdom, and that's true. You have wisdom. You managed to get yourselves here today. That involved a certain degree of wisdom. Congratulations and well done.

But there are people who have greater wisdom. And they are the people that we vote into power. They have the wisdom of all of us combined. Everybody puts in their vote and you end up with this product. And if you subscribe to the theory, which I think is beyond doubt, that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, then the wisdom of our elected officials is unimpeachable.

I think you should reflect on that before you cast your vote today, because if you consider voting for the other side, what you're in fact doing is exercising the deficiency in your wisdom.

This principle that the elected have an unimpeachable wisdom is under threat at the moment, in ways that we've never seen before in this country. The recent push in every state, and obviously as a federal campaign, for the introduction of a bill of rights, is perhaps one of the most disgusting developments in Australian political life, because what it does is it says that we're going to take power away from elected representatives and give it to other people who we think might have wisdom, such as judges and so on, people like that. This is a problem because if we start to doubt the wisdom of the elected we prevent them from being able to do very, very important things, such as torture people in the search for information. It's very important that they have the power to do this – where necessary, they're sensible

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people, they exercise the wisdom of all of us; at least I think that's right.

What we have to do, given this sustained attack, is we have to reassert this principle. We have to reassert the wisdom of the elected, because without it we lose democracy. Without it we might as well just turf democracy, decide who it is that has wisdom and make them governments for life.

This is the way in which societies should develop. We should really begin by considering the relationship of government to communities. All we have to do is figure out how we're going to calibrate that relationship in a way that preserves Australian values.

And the two values I'm going to talk about here obviously are tolerance and democracy. How do we deal with the uppitiness of community groups, being tolerant of that, while at the same time defending our democracy? I think the fact that we're tolerant is reflected in the fact that we need to strike a mean path here. Let's not be extreme about this – community groups, I think, should still be allowed to exist. But we have to balance that with democracy. So the democratic solution is that we must treat more favourably those who don't disagree with elected representatives, because they are the only community groups that are not engaged in some kind of shameless attack on the will of the Australian people.

So what governments need to do, in accordance with Australian values, and particularly in accordance with the mechanisms of the free market that we hold so dearly, is they can't just ban these groups. What we need to do is instead is incentivise. I think that's fairly easy to do – we fund those groups that deserve it and we tax those groups that don't. It's not a difficult equation. Those that insist on lobbying government, or at least putting forward arguments that are different to those of government, deserve a tax. Why should the government be rewarding those who are attacking the Australian people?

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Our fashionably totalitarian opponents on the very far left of the stage are in fact putting forward a proposition that would demolish democracy. We put forward one that would nurture it, by silencing those who would oppose the wisdom of the Australian people.

### **Joan Kirner:**

The final speaker is Karyn Walsh. Karyn is currently the president of QCOSS in Queensland. QCOSS, as you would know, is a voice for social justice in the Queensland community, that works to eliminate inequities and disadvantage, and supports individuals and organisations.

Karyn said she joined QCOSS in order to better understand the changes occurring within and influencing the not-for-profit sector, particularly in its engagement with the government in light of what she says is a growing tension between the government and the community sector.

She has a long history in community and youth involvement. She is active in the ESTA centre, a state-wide network for people who have experienced abuse in institutions, foster care and detention centres. And like all presidents or CEOs of social service organisations, she's run off her feet, and I'm very glad she's taken the time to be with us today. Please welcome Karyn.

### **Karyn Walsh:**

I'm going to take a different tack in saying that what we think of as a democracy should be the ability to actually look at a few different arguments and a few different points of view, that as a people we can have politicians that could act on compromise rather than the raw power of simply being in government.

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I'm speaking against the proposition that politicians should have the legitimacy to set community priorities for a number of reasons. One, they don't represent who the community is, and nor are they in touch with the lived realities of the people and the diversity and the history of this country.

When I went to look at the constitution, I thought I might get some inspiration for today about a mission statement that our politicians worked for. What are the values and beliefs and the rights and the principles that our politicians are safeguarding? The right to maintain a democracy? The right to hear what different people believe in? The experiences that have oppressed people, or believing in the Indigenous people of our land, giving them the rights to be valued and respected as the first people of the land? There are no such words in the constitution. So the first reason why I'm against simply letting our vote determine who sets the priorities is that we as a country don't have a statement that we can hold them accountable to. We don't have a statement in a constitution that says, "These are the principles that we believe inform a civil society and a democratic society." So we can't leave it to the politicians; we can't have it so that we just vote and then they take over.

Often when we're preparing to go and see politicians in Queensland we're told they read nothing, they don't listen, they'll be talking to you about what they're doing, you've got to put everything in three concise dot points. In one event when we were talking about we wanted to see the government address, a whole-of-government approach to poverty, we were told, "Well, you know, you'll have to get it in three dot points." So why would any of us want to reduce ourselves to a point of view in three dot points and leave the politicians to decide those priorities?

Often the issues that we come up against and the information that politicians need to set priorities is hidden amongst the power of the market place; it's hidden behind the power of who is elected and it's also hidden by the power of who we are as a community sector.

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If we continue to follow the path that politicians have to set these priorities, then we're going to continue to experience the perception and the reality of people's voices being silenced. And that means that whilst we feel silenced, the people who come to our organisations, the people we engage with all the time, won't have a voice. It is our right to actually represent the minority. It is our right to represent our own issues in communities and neighbourhoods.

If we leave it to politicians then it becomes the politicians' right to gather the information, to gather the view, to have a public sector that gives them the information that they need to set priorities. And we're excluded. And, more importantly, the people that we're engaged with are excluded.

Part of the role for us as a not-for-profit sector, as communities who want to have control, is to bridge those gaps in a democracy. And we can't bridge those gaps if we only leave it to when we vote. We have to somehow bring into our own understanding the humanity, the reality of people who are dismissed. We have a shameful history with the Indigenous community. We have a shameful history with the institutionalisation and the harm that it's done for children, for people with a disability and mental illness.

If we continue to say it's only our vote that is going to set the priorities, then how are those people ever going to get their voices heard? How are they ever going to challenge us to progress, to really look beyond reason, to look beyond what is just popular for the day, to look beyond what has made our life prosperous or the benefits that we receive in a community? To really look at how people have missed out?

Politicians as Kay Patterson said to us earlier, are only people too. I think as a democracy, limiting it to the vote is not enough. We really have to bring together the different groups, to talk to each other as we do. And we really have to bring together the most marginalised to speak with the politicians so that we can set new agendas and we can have the vision of a just and a democratic society.

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### **Joan Kirner:**

Thank you very much Karen. Hands up those in this room who are politicians. You're all telling a big fib. Every single one of you is not doing your job as a volunteer or an agency person unless you're engaged in politics, surely. Isn't that true? So hands up if you're engaged in politics. Every time you make a decision you're engaged in politics. So it's very important, I think, that we don't use the term 'politician' as disparaging.

Now summing up for the negative, I understand we have John and Karyn doing a duo act, is that right? Democracy at work.

### **John Roskam:**

Thank you, Joan. Now, an oxymoron is a contradictory statement, and we've heard a lot of contradictory statements from the Affirmative today. Examples of oxymorons are things like military intelligence, a compassionate lawyer, an honest politician (sorry Joan). But of course the granddaddy of them all today is the one that the Affirmative would have you believe but which is wrong: The wisdom of government.

Now, we don't have to speculate about the sort of world that we would live in if the Affirmative team got their way. We live in that sort of world right now, because the logical conclusion of what the Affirmative is saying is, if you're not going to give power to the community and all of us, and you're going to hand power to the politicians, why stop at the group of politicians? Why not just hand power, untrammelled authority, to one person?

Now, we have an example of that. We have in this country someone who's been in the job a long time, someone who's not getting any younger, someone who has suppressed any internal rebellion, someone who's had some good victories but is facing difficult times

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and could be staring defeat in the face. If you decide to vote for the Affirmative today, you will be deciding to renew Kevin Sheedy's contract. Don't do it!

**Joan Kirner:**

For a moment I thought he was talking about me. Karyn:

**Karyn Walsh:**

I think the main reason that we have to vote against the Affirmative of limiting our role to the vote is that if we do, we'll be participating in the continuing death and demise of democracy in our country. We were led to believe that democracy would die from an act of terror. But it is really, to use a quote from Robert Hillman, "the slow extinction from apathy, indifference and under-nourishment".

I think that we have to vote against, and believe in our own power as advocates for communities in control. Our challenge is not to limit ourselves to our vote, but to be the alternative to apathy through active participation, the alternative to indifference, to be well informed in debate and to participate and create that debate. And to be the alternative to under-nourishment so that we can continue to nourish and advocate for ourselves and our communities so that all Australians can participate in the social and economic wellbeing of the country.

**Joan Kirner:**

Thank you, Karen. And now Madame Rose will sum up for the Affirmative.

## **Anne Dunn:**

Now look, ladies and gentlemen, let's be clear. There are only two really important things for you to keep in your mind. The first is self interest, clearly laid out by my colleague Waleed. We are ordinary people from the street. We've no self interest in this particular debate, whereas these people over here represent organisations, their very future and livelihood is dependent on them winning this debate. They argue from self interest and we argue from self righteousness.

Secondly, I want to raise with you the question of values. It is about values. Do not be misled by them. Mateship, fair go for all, respect for each other, democracy and pride in our leaders – pride for us and pride that we can hand on to our children.

So I'll get you to join with me now; I know you'll be fantastic. Just kind of let go with full voice and see how you feel at the end of it.

*[To the tune of 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean']*

*Bring back, bring back, oh bring back our values to you and me.  
Pollies, pollies, we'll shepherd our community.*

*Australia is courting disaster.  
We're facing a catastrophe.  
We think that the people know better  
Than the leaders of democracy.*

*Bring back, bring back, oh bring back our values to you and me.  
Pollies, pollies, we'll shepherd our community.*

*As people we are easy going.  
Relaxed, we treat life as a breeze.  
So let's give our pollies a challenge, to meet all our priorities.*

*Bring back, bring back, oh bring back our values to you and me.  
Pollies, pollies, we'll shepherd our community.*

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*The poor and the weak and the homeless  
Rely on our politicians,  
To make sure their needs are considered,  
Not passed in the life auction.*

*Bring back, bring back, oh bring back our values to you and me.  
Pollies, pollies, we'll shepherd our community.*

*It's time to stand up and be counted.  
Get pollies that will not be cursed.  
So we can sit back 'til elections,  
And know that our wishes come first.*

*Bring back, bring back, oh bring back our values to you and me.  
Pollies, pollies, we'll shepherd our community.*

### **Joan Kirner:**

That's the beginning of the debate. It's a debate that we're all involved in almost every day. It's a debate that we need to be involved in because somewhere between these extreme points of view and well thought and beautifully argued, and humouredly argued points of view, is the future society, a society that moves forward with all of its people.

So please can you thank all the contributors: Anne, John, Waleed and Karyn.

And now the big moment ... I'm going to call for the vote for the Affirmative, that's Rose's and Waleed's team first. All those in favour for the Affirmative team winning?

### **[Audience applause]**

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Thank you. All those in favour of the Negative team winning?

**[Audience applause]**

Can we have people standing in their places please?

**[Audience laughter]**

All those who favour the Affirmative team winning, please stand and don't move?

**[Audience laughter]**

Thank you. Please sit down. According to Father Joe Caddy that was 370. All those in favour of the Negative team winning please stand. 371.

**[Audience laughter and applause]**

Thank you everybody.

**Fr Joe Caddy:**

When Jack Munday was talking the other day, he talked about democracy really residing in that extra-parliamentary activity and I think that we've just engaged in a bit of that. I think we should really thank the contributors to our great debate this year. I think, scarily enough, there was a little of truth in each of their presentations. So

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can we thank Anne Dunn and Waleed Aly, and John Roskam and Karyn Walsh.

And finally, last year we described Joan as the Moderator of the debate. But we learned. And this year we called her Adjudicator, because Joan isn't that moderate. She's anything but moderate when it comes to her passion for communities and her love for people. So can we give Joan a big hand for helping us today.

**[Audience applause]**

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