

# **Major Party Senators: campaigns, organisation and resource disposal**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Major party Senators are highly partisan and campaign focused. Senators are organisationally dependent in large part due to party pre-selections. This paper analyses their relationship with their party organisation, particularly how that relationship manifests itself during election campaigning. Major party Senators operate as an important conduit between local and central party campaigns. Further, Senator roles and their seniority can be classified according to the campaign role they play. It will be shown that Senators effectively operate in one of three forms during political campaigns: centrally, on a regional duty leader level, or on a micro seat-by-seat basis. There is overlap of strategic approach between parties, however state variables as well as variables between Government and Opposition are important to their representative functioning. This paper begins by evaluating the resource advantages afforded to major party Senators. Senatorial resources include human capital, material resources and financial allowances. It will be shown that major party Senators, representatives without direct electoral accountability, receive substantial parliamentary allowances in multiple forms. They use these resources for campaigning and for factional activities. This paper therefore illustrates the organisational affiliation, relationship and roles performed by major party Senators. It also details resource disposal by Senators, including particulars of party and factional application. As the Australian political environment continues to move towards a more professional permanent campaigning context, these Senatorial functions will increase in their representative significance.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The role major parties expect of their Senatorial teams includes that of campaign assistance. While institutional service in Canberra during parliamentary sitting weeks and serving on Senate Committees is important, the campaign assistance role Senators perform directly helps the party in retaining or attaining government. The major party senator is supported by a large allocation of Commonwealth Parliamentary resources, including staff, office materials and budgeted postage. The Senator and his/her resources assist major parties in their professional political campaigning. This paper outlines the resources afforded to Senators, the manner in which the parties make use of them, and the advantages they offer. A Senator's role as a conduit between the various sections of a party is an important one. It also has the potential in an increasingly professionalised campaigning environment to further entrench the major parties hold on the Lower House to the exclusion of minor parties.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The information contained in this paper has been drawn from academic literature and popular writings. The paper is part of a wider study into the contemporary functioning of the Australian Senate within the framework of professional party campaigning. Interviews with over thirty parliamentarians and their staffers have been conducted. Such interviews, referred to in part in this paper, were provided either on the record or anonymously. The sensitive nature of party practices divulged in some interviews required anonymity. In addition to the texts and interviews referred to, the author gained first hand knowledge of Senatorial functioning through observational studies during the 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliaments.

The following section systematically details the parliamentary entitlements Senators are awarded by the Commonwealth Parliament. Such entitlements are central to the campaigning arrangements Senators enter into to support their affiliated political party. The detailing of such arrangements is a necessary first step in exploring major party Senators' campaigning responsibilities in Australia.

## **PARLIAMENTARY ENTITLEMENTS**

All Senators are provided with an office both in Parliament House and in their home state. They are free to set up the home state office in the location of their choice. There are size and cost guidelines, detailed in a document entitled 'Senators and Members Entitlements', provided to all MPs. This document summarises information contained in the *Parliamentary Entitlements Act 1990*, and its various amendments. At pages one and two of the document there is an 'Explanatory Statement' outlining the purpose of the Act, recent amendments to the entitlements available and restrictions on usage Senators and members should be aware of. This document is updated for the life of each parliament or as required.

Each Senator is allocated three full-time staffing positions, as well as a casual staffing allowance. There are three bands for paying electorate staff; levels A, B and C. Senators, as with Members of the House of Representatives (MHR's), can choose to have either three level B staffers, or one at each level. Each of the positions may be filled by job sharing on a part time basis at any or all of the levels available, within the guidelines referred to above. The salary range for a level A electorate officer is \$30,190 - \$40,573 pa; level B \$39,544 - \$44,087 pa; and level C \$42,747 - \$47,318 pa.<sup>1</sup> Where a particular staffer is located on the salary bands is at the discretion of the MP (within certain guidelines). Each staffer also receives an electoral allowance of \$3,677 pa in lieu of overtime if they so

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are drawn from the 40<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

choose. Where staffers choose to claim overtime, the overall office maximum for overtime claimed is \$31,515pa. Senators' offices are also allocated an annual relief staffing budget of \$9,096 (as at 2001/02).<sup>2</sup>

Job sharing is a form of staffing MPs of both Houses often use. It allows them to employ more staff, often local party members, thereby, for example, satisfying a greater number of potential party pre-selectors. Senators chiefly use job sharing as a method of gaining greater output from each staffing position. Interviews have suggested that the nature of political staffing is such that most staffers put in more hours than a standard working week. By employing staffers on a part time basis, and persons who are often ambitious for a political career themselves, Senators obtain a staffer that will usually voluntarily work more hours or days than the part time position covers, without being paid overtime. In 2001 a document entitled 'Howard Government Directory' was published for the use of Coalition parliamentarians and staffers. It contains job descriptions, contact details and locations of offices, and is a valuable communications tool of the Coalition. It indicates that a number of Coalition Senators have more than three staffers, on part time job sharing arrangements.

Senate offices are provided with various hardware and software equipment. Hardware includes four top line desktop computers, a laptop and docking station, two high speed laser printers, a portable printer, a colour printer and separate scanner, a palm pilot, and a label printer. Software includes various Microsoft products, and Internet applications. Offices are also equipped with photocopiers and letter folding machines for constituent correspondence. Such equipment is central to the efficient usage of Senatorial offices for the purpose of campaign assistance points for MPs and candidates. There are four telephone lines in each office, and the Senator is given a mobile phone with unlimited call use.<sup>3</sup> Senators also receive access to a Commonwealth car.

Senators are also entitled to mail-out and printing allowances. These resources are similar to those afforded to MHRs. Senators, like MHRs, are entitled to \$25,000 pa as a 'communications allowance', which is designed to cover the cost of distribution of letters, newsletters and parcels and electronic services (including maintenance of websites). This allowance is generally used on direct mail-outs.

*'It is accepted practice that material concerned with the re-election of the Member in his or her electorate may be included in a newsletter, but not material*

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<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned payment bands are correct as at 30 June 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The operation of political databases (van Onselen & Errington, 2004) requires telephone canvassing and polling to collect information on constituents for entry into the database. The telephone lines in Senatorial offices are paid for under parliamentary entitlements, and are therefore a cost effective avenue for compiling database data in this manner.

*concerned with the election or re-election of anyone else.'* (Senators and Members Entitlements: 30)

As a Senator is a representative of an entire state, he/she is entitled to send mail-outs anywhere in the state they represent. Therefore, Senators target their mail-outs to particular electorates inside their home states and remain within the parliamentary guidelines for resource usage. In order to adhere to the guidelines referred to in the above quote, mail-outs by senators tend to carry generic Government or Opposition messages. The photographs within the brochure will often include both the Senator and the local MP or candidate. Such practice provides the local candidate or MP with effective voter exposure without violating the parliamentary guidelines, and without costing the campaign additional funds. Photo opportunities will often also include pictures of the Senator and candidate with the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition.

MPs are also allowed to carry over unspent communications allowances from one year into the next, providing them with the opportunity to save up allowances for election years. Any allowance not spent within two consecutive years will expire. This practice is common amongst Senators performing duty functions. While major party Senators generally use their offices as a front base in-between campaigns, they tend to spend their mail-out allowance closer to elections in order to have greater influence on voters.

The printing allowances of MHRs is capped at \$125,000 pa. There is no similar cap for Senators. The Department of the Senate covers the full cost of personalised stationery for Senators. Whilst the uncapped nature of such entitlements has the potential to afford Senators an extraordinary opportunity to assist with their functionary party roles, the fact that the Department of the Senate controls the allocation of such resources does stifle their useability for partisan purposes.

Senator entitlements also include a range of travel allowances, study leave and access to newspapers and periodicals. These entitlements, though substantial, do not directly impact on their functioning as significantly as those entitlements detailed herein.

A further entitlement allocated to Senators is access to the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) data on electors. Such information is supplied electronically to all MPs. The elector information supplied is restricted to the area the MP represents, which in the case of Senators is for the entire state they represent. This elector information is central to the efficient running of the major parties' database systems which track voters, the details of which have been outlined by van Onselen and Errington (2004). Senators' entitlements in this regard are crucial in

gaining information for candidates who do not represent the party in parliament. Given that the information is only supplied to elected MPs, the only way non-incumbent candidates can obtain access to this information is through their Senate teams – who have access to AEC voter information on all electors in their home state.

It should also be noted that the electorate allowance component of Senators' salaries is not subject to tax where it is used as part of their parliamentary functioning (subject to certain conditions) rather than as a salary top up. Such a removal of taxation encourages MPs to use their allowance for party gain rather than as a salary benefit.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Senators, this means that a duty Senator has an additional \$27,300 to contribute to a particular marginal seat as part of their annual direct mail-outs, for example. Senators on occasions use this allowance to further their factional or policy interests also. Senators Ian Campbell and Marise Payne have each distributed policy and/or newsletter updates to large mailing lists of policy officers and/or factional colleagues (Payne, interview with author).

Given the size of the above detailed resource allocation to Senators, and given that Senators are not tied to a particular electorate for personal survival, the location and use of Senators' offices and resources has become an important strategic consideration for major parties in Australia.

## **ALLOCATION OF SENATORIAL RESOURCES**

In political campaigns, the allocation of a Senator's resources as detailed above, can have a significant political advantage on the seat within which those resources operate. Securing a third senator in a half senate election therefore provides an important additional set of resources for campaigning.<sup>5</sup> If one major party is able to secure the third senator in consecutive half senate elections, that party will have a 50% larger set of senator resources (6 senators compared with only 4). Two additional Senators could greatly improve campaigning if their resources were appropriately utilised in a professional manner.

Major party Senators do not have a constituency that they are directly accountable to. With the onset of the party system in 1909-10 (Sawer, 1999: 1-2) they no longer function purely as a states representative. Therefore, Senators have a significant allocation of resources which a party is free to use to its best advantage during the course of an election

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<sup>4</sup> A Senator's annual salary (without entitlements) is \$95,600 as at 10 November 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Major parties consistently return a minimum of two and a maximum of three Senators at each half Senate election.

campaign. During campaigns, Senators often out-source their staff to marginal Lower House seats either held by their own party or by the alternate major party. This additional personnel on the ground provides advantage to the major party that targets a marginal seat with these resources, or major parties collectively when compared to minor parties or independents trying to break into Lower House contests. The two party system is therefore further entrenched by Senatorial staffing resources.

Senator postal allowances are useful in marginal seats for conducting mail-outs on particular issues of relevance to that geographical location. Interviews have indicated it is common for Senators to “pledge” their postal allowance on or around the time of campaigning to a specific member of their party’s Lower House. Senator Sue Knowles’ postal pledged to Liberal colleague Barry Hase’s seat of Kalgoorlie at the 2001 federal election was reported in the media following earlier revelations of such activity by political website [www.crikey.com.au](http://www.crikey.com.au)<sup>6</sup>, including a leaked letter from the Senator to the member for Kalgoorlie concerning the issue.

Senators regularly set up their office space in marginal seats of opposing or own party candidates/MHRs. As many as 87% of major party Senatorial offices from the 39<sup>th</sup> Australian Parliament were located in either a marginal seat or a seat held by the opposing major party (van Onselen, 2004: NP). Such strategic locating of offices is an interesting first indicator as to the geographical campaigning strategies to be implemented by major party Senators, and reflects their functioning of what the parties refer to as ‘duty Senator’ activity.<sup>7</sup>

Senators that do not place their offices in marginal seats, often placing them in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices (CPO) instead, use their office space for a state-wide distribution of resources in support of the organisations national or state based campaign. Such functioning by Senators is termed ‘patron’ Senatorship<sup>8</sup>, and is more common amongst the Coalition than the ALP (likely more a reflection of the Coalition’s federal incumbency since 1996 than party differences).

Given electoral strategies involving the use of Senate resources for marginal seat campaigning, the ALP’s comparative decline in Senate numbers since the rise of the Australian Greens, WA Greens and Australian Democrats, could have electoral consequences for Lower House contests. The loss of additional resources as a result of fewer

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<sup>6</sup> [www.crikey.com.au](http://www.crikey.com.au) is an Australian website that details political activities. It is largely gossip based, however occasionally breaks stories such as the Kernot / Evans affair in 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Duty Senator activity involves Senators being allocated an area to assist Lower House MPs or non-incumbent candidates. It represents the geographical locating of a Senator to assist with party profile in the given area.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with senators from both sides of the major party divide have confirmed this terminology.

Senators, combined with the disadvantage of Opposition, means the ALP are currently under resourced amongst their Senate teams in contemporary Australian politics. For more information on the Coalition advantage in the Senate, see van Onselen (2003).

Senatorial resources and the nature of their allocation therefore assist in entrenching the two party system in Lower House contests. Partisanship is displayed through the allocation of such resources. That is, Senators tend to allocate their resources at the behest of the party organisations.

## PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Established political parties generally have well defined party structures. The organisational wing of the party is one aspect of such structures. American political scientist Frank Sorauf suggested that political parties comprise three spheres or sections of party activity: the party in government, the party in the electorate, and the party organisation (1980: 8-10). These three aspects of party represent the parliamentarians, electors that identify and vote with a particular party, and the structured party bureaucracy. Ian Ward has used this same structure to describe and analyse political parties in Australia (1991: 154), most recently the Australian Democrats (Ward, 1997). In doing so, he adapted Sorauf's model to include organised branch membership as it applies in Australia. Consider the following adapted figure:

**Figure A: Three sections of party in Australia**

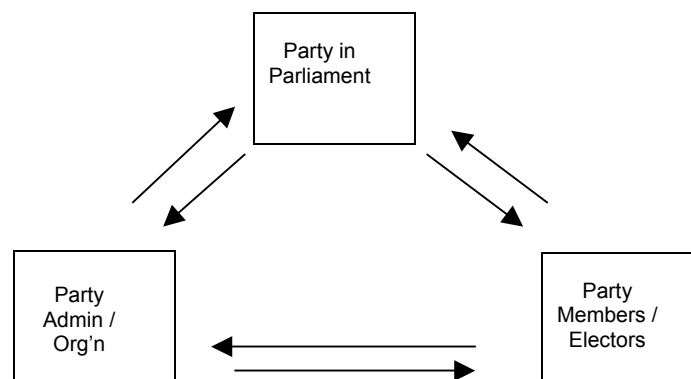


Figure A assists in understanding the complex relationships and interdependence between sections of Australian political parties, particularly major parties. Ward concluded that all too often the understanding of a political party is limited or focused to a particular aspect of the above model. In actuality, each of the three arms of party are both essential and effective elements of party operations in Australia, and any study of party activity must understand their individual importance

as well as their relationship with one another. Major party Senators provide an important link between all three arms of the party. In relation to the party in the electorate, duty Senatorship roles encourage constituents to vote for the party, perhaps even joining it. The party in parliament and the central party organisational wing do not always see eye to eye. Differences are often most pronounced during the heated environment of political campaigning. Local candidates need to be conscious of central party directives generally, as well as local issues within their area. The organisational wing of the party, whilst aiming at securing local victories (particularly in the marginal seats) also needs to focus on the overall campaign strategy. Differences in focus and approach between the local and central arms of the party can lead to tension between these respective arms of political parties. For example, opinion polling has become a substantial part of modern political campaigning (Peisley and Ward, 2001). Political parties invest large amounts of capital to survey activities aimed at identifying key issues, key seats, and areas of voter satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Interviews have indicated that polling is primarily run by of the central party; however it is often financed by funds raised in local contests. As such, both spheres of party can claim a certain degree of ownership of polling. However, generally it is the central party that has ownership, and who distributes results at their discretion.

Distribution of such information is rarely complete. For example, where a local candidate is doing better or worse than expected, the central party aims to avoid complacency, or inversely, despair. Accordingly it often does not make the data fully available. House MPs in marginal seats can find such lack of disclosure frustrating. Jackie Kelly MP, Member for Lindsay, has been faced with such difficulties. She commissions independent polling, as do a number of her parliamentary colleagues.<sup>9</sup> Interview evidence with other House MPs and their staffers supports this claim. Such MPs have suggested it is important to be able to access the data in order to gear their campaign towards the issues and statistical findings obtained from polling. MPs on both sides have suggested the central party does not want MPs to access polling data which may expose campaign difficulties at the central level, or identify issues of local concern the party is not acting on. Such findings would encourage maverick actions along the lines highlighted by Emy (1974: 455-492), such as acting against partisan lines during campaigns. It is impossible to verify such competing claims. However, a Senator's presence in local contests serves as an important link between central and local campaigns, helping to minimise the fallout from such tensions. Their value is heightened given their predominately central pre-parliamentary party backgrounds, as well as the predominance of party career ambition amongst their staffers.

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<sup>9</sup> Confidential interview.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ORGANISATION AND CANDIDATES

Political representation in all western democracies is defined most significantly by party. Merkl suggested 'party systems are among the most important political institutions of the twentieth century society' (1980: 1). Jaensch, referring to Merkl, suggests that in the Australian context 'parties and the party system are not just among the most important, they remain the critical components in the polity' (1994: 1). Therefore, it is not surprising that where major parties are presented with a set of Upper House representatives, largely devoid of electoral accountability other than that owed to party pre-selections, they look to use them to further the political cause of the party. In the case of Australia, this is best served by assisting Lower House MPs in individual member contests. Significant partisanship amongst major party Senators can therefore also be evaluated as it affects Senators' activity outside of parliament.

The fact that Senate pre-selection is controlled by the respective central party organisations, and candidates do not require a high public profile, means that the central selection body of each major party is more likely to elect someone from within their own ranks. The pre-parliamentary backgrounds of Senators supports such a finding (Farrell & McAllister, 1995). This again increases partisanship amongst Senators. In the case of House contests, local party branches dominate the selection process.

Senators rarely involve themselves directly in constituency concerns, rather acting as a conduit between the central party and the local, often inexperienced, marginal seat non-incumbent candidate or MP. Whilst constituency engagement can and does happen because of this functioning, it is largely vested in the Senator's office and staff, as a support to the candidate, rather than the Senators' themselves. Senators personally function at the strategic rather than the grassroots level. This party functionary expectation has received remarkably little academic attention amongst Australian political scientists.

Differences exist between Australian states and the respective major parties in relation to Senatorial roles and relationships with the party organisation. Such variations are caused by factors such as differing state populations and geographical sizes, differing party performances from state to state, and the ideological differences between the more collectivist ALP and the individualist Liberal/National Coalition. For example, in larger states with more marginal seats, Senators often manage a collection of seats. Conversely, in smaller states the Senator can become responsible

for individual management of a particular marginal seat that the central party considers needs attention.

The only defined rule is the existence of a duty Senator relationship. The particulars of organisational / local campaign relations are ill-defined. Therefore, I have classified the relationship between Senators and the party organisations into three forms – central party activity, regional duty senator role and individual management of a particular marginal seat.

Top tier activity at the central level includes travelling with the party leader on campaigns, or working out of campaign headquarters (CHQ). Such Senators tend to be senior within the party, often having had substantial organisational experience prior to entering parliament (as recorded in pre-parliamentary backgrounds), and/or ministerial experience. In these cases, the staff of the Senator is generally out-sourced between various marginal seats. Electorate officers usually perform a support staff function in such seats, sometimes operating wholly in one seat, sometimes between a number of seats. Ministerial staff, however, will usually take a central role alongside the Senator (where their portfolio's staffing responsibility is a low campaign priority). Of course, while Senators who double up as ministers are out of their ministerial offices, the role of senior staff in coordinating the office in the ministers' absence becomes even more vital. This can take away from ministerial staffing capacity to assist at the grass roots level of campaigns (coupled with the fact most are also Canberra-based).

The second tier is a campaigning responsibility for a number of seats, termed a 'regional duty Senator'. Such Senators have generally had prior experience working in CHQ or as an individual duty Senator for a particular seat. These Senators take responsibility for a range of seats, within a geographical area, and seats identified as marginal. The role is determined by the central party following polling, and involves a conduit responsibility between the organisation and the collection of candidates and MPs. Second tier roles can include having responsibility for unwinnable seats in order to improve the party's Senate vote within their home state. This function is of particular relevance where the Senator is running at number three on the ticket, and hence also campaigning for his/her own political survival. The organisation knows this, and generally uses such Senators in this position, knowing that they will be highly motivated. For example, Liberal Senator Ross Lightfoot, positioned third on the party ticket in WA, was the regional duty senator for a number of outer suburban seats in the lead up to the 2001 election.

The final and most common tier of Senator involvement in campaigning pertains to direct involvement in a particular seat, generally a marginal seat. This is a very important task for the party when a local candidate

has limited experience, or where the seat has been identified as especially electorally close. It also regularly occurs from Opposition, where parties chiefly aim at unseating sitting members in a bid to win government. Under such circumstances non-incumbent candidates do not have the benefit of incumbency advantages such as a paid staff or office space and resources, making Senatorial resources outlined previously all the more valuable.

The environment in which a local campaign operates can dictate the extent of Senatorial involvement in a particular election campaign. The intra-party relationship between local and central campaigns is the primary factor in this regard. The nature and form of this relationship impacts on the type of role played by Senators in campaigns, and can vary. In this respect variables such as incumbency, party orientation, the state in question and factional affiliations can all play a part in defining the relationship between the local candidate and the Senators. Often local campaigns are unwilling to accept central party directions or assistance. Consider the following quote:

*"The central party doesn't have a clue what we do here. They try and dictate to us from their ivory tower at party headquarters, but most of them have never even been to my electorate. They probably couldn't get here with a road map!"*  
Government Marginal seat backbencher.

In such cases it is likely the role for Senators is therefore also diminished. A diminished role of a Senator in such local campaigns does not necessarily also diminish their resource involvement however. For example, Jackie Kelly used staff from the offices of Senator's Helen Coonan and Marise Payne in the lead-up to the 2001 federal election, however, she did not involve either Senator personally in her campaign. Reasons for this include: the outer western suburbs location of Jackie Kelly's seat, the MP's dislike of central party presence in her local campaigning, and Payne's desire to campaign in unwinnable seats to improve the Senate vote (given her number three ticketed position) across the state.<sup>10</sup>

Senators locating themselves in marginal seats at elections and providing the central party organisation with a clear access point are important for both the organisation and the candidate. For example the central party has a number of hooks it can use to force increased intervention, including resource allocations, access to ministers and Government Members Secretariat (GMS) publications.<sup>11</sup> A Senator can break down

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<sup>10</sup> As the western Sydney Coalition duty Senator, Marise Payne was also given the responsibility of managing inexperienced newcomer Pat Farmer's campaign for the seat of Macarthur.

<sup>11</sup> The Government Members Secretariat (GMS) is a taxpayer-funded arm of government. It assists with MPs of the government, in relation to database operation, training of staff and the issuing of generic literature for seat by seat publication. It is an important advantage of incumbency, similar to the Keating

resentment over the quality and quantity of such assistance, keep the central office informed of a seats progress while also ensuring the local point of view is passed on to the central party.

## PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND CAMPAIGNING

Generally, the capacity and desire of major party organisations to intervene in local contests has increased with the growth in the size and sophistication of campaigning over the last decade – an indication of increased professionalism. This trend is interesting in its growth given the equally prevalent trend of increased locally oriented campaigning. I would suggest ‘local campaigning’ is a tool used by a professionalised central campaign to engage voters on issues of prominence in their local communities. Interviews have substantiated this hypothesis. Central tools such as voter databases facilitate this approach. The role of Senators in local campaigns represents an extension of such professional practice in campaigning.

Increased professionalism in this respect results in a more coherent national campaign which is ‘on message’, as according to the central party approach. Further, individual electorate campaigns are not overly generic as it has the flexibility to incorporate the local issues of each electorate. For example, central parties produce generic literature of an ‘on message’ nature attacking or promoting (depending on Government v Opposition perspective) particular issues. The local campaigns thereafter fill in the blanks with particular local issues structured around the central formula in use. For example, if the issue is local education funding, the brochure is structured around the theme of funding advantages the government have offered in the area of education (or cuts in funding if an opposition brochure). The brochure may include a map of the electorate that can be cut into a generic space provided. The headings remain, perhaps with the inserting of electorate titles, and the funding quotes are inserted from department information obtained (or in the case of opposition, from information obtained from sources such as Senate Estimates Committees). This provision of materials ensures a unified style amongst the party candidates, and it saves local offices the time involved in formatting and design.

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Government’s media unit. Gerard Wheeler, former political adviser to Prime Minister John Howard, and now in charge of the GMS, stated: "The Government Members' Secretariat was established to provide training and support to Members, Senators, Ministers and their staff to assist them in servicing their constituents and ensuring the efficient and effective operation of electorate offices. Training programmes are conducted in areas of activity relevant to Members and Senators. A number of staff from the GMS also travel out to electorate offices to provide assistance for staff who are unable to travel to Canberra." (Email communication with author, 05/09/03).

Although such central assistance can afford local campaigns significant benefits, they do come with strings attached (as already alluded to). One such string often involves the campaign role given to duty Senators. Both Labor and Coalition Senators can and do assume campaign committee responsibility. The previous section identified the three tiers of involvement Senators have in campaigns. The second and third tiers represent Senators interacting with local campaigns directly. Where such activity occurs, the central party uses the Senators to monitor the format of the local campaign. Senators' loyalty to the central party is largely assured because of his/her pre-parliamentary central party experience. Equally however, Senators do not want to habitually disregard local concerns. Local branches can have an impact on a Senators pre-selection through local conference delegates.<sup>12</sup> Equally, a local MP or candidate dissatisfied with a Senator's involvement in his/her campaign would be able to influence such delegates pre-selection positions with regards to the Senator in question (not to mention the larger campaign committee that may be dissatisfied). As such, Senators' try to adhere to the central party's directives, however, not where they conflict with strong local concerns and issues. In short, they attempt to balance central and local party interests in order to effectively campaign and thereby win elections.

The professional practices of Senators at a local level are assisted by their ability to allocate resources to the campaign. Campaigning resources offered to a local contest by Senators and CHQ include money, strategic advice, technical and professional assistance, visits by party leaders and even the transfer of staff (see entitlements section). They are also able to obtain state or nation wide quotes for corflutes<sup>13</sup> and general printing production, thereby lowering costs across seats. The reception to these offers of assistance varies. Members of Parliament seeking re-election tend to push Senators and CHQ to a more subservient position because they have their own parliamentary entitlements that they are able to use for campaigning. Further, they have experience in office which generally means they want to exert more control over their own campaign. Non-incumbent candidates tend to be more dependent on Senators and CHQ, given their lack of staff, money and general parliamentary resources. Accordingly, it is in Opposition that Senators are likely to have the greatest role in campaigning at the local level. Oppositions generally focus their Senate team on supporting non-incumbent candidates in marginal seats rather than on re-contesting sitting members.<sup>14</sup> They do

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<sup>12</sup> More so in the Liberal Party.

<sup>13</sup> This is the term used by both major parties to refer to the posters they use with candidate faces and names, often attached to telephone poles.

<sup>14</sup> Oppositions need to retain the seats they hold in the Lower House as well as win additional seats from the incumbent in order to win Government. Incumbent MPs recontesting office have parliamentary entitlements as previously described for their re-election campaign. Non-incumbent candidates do not have such entitlements to assist in their campaigns. It is for these reasons Opposition Senators target their resources at non-incumbent candidates.

this in an effort to secure the additional seats needed to win Government. As these candidates are highly dependent on Senate offices, in a way that sitting-members are not, Senators exert greater influence over local campaigns from Opposition than they do in Government. Interviews have indicated the ALP imposes a more coherent central party position regarding corflute production and additions than does the Coalition. The Liberal/National Coalition tends to be more individualistic in this respect. This difference is reflective of each party's different philosophical orientation.

As part of the attempt to ensure campaigns are consistent from one local contest to the next, major parties offer briefings, seminars and campaign kits as a means of educating and creating consistency. Party campaign and policy manuals provide information to local campaigns. Such materials describe campaign organisations in detail, as well as outline tasks for candidates such as fundraising, office space and location, the need to canvass the electorate and dealing with the media. The size and sophistication of these packages (as well as impact) varies from key to non-key seats.

The professionalisation of politics has even led to such practices as SMS messaging to all candidates on their mobile telephones to ensure consistency throughout a campaign, and to ensure all candidates and MPs are informed of the major news items of the moment. The role of Senators assists in this process. The majority of major party Senators are expected to act as a first point of contact for local MPs and candidates concerned about central party directives. Generally, duty Senatorship has assisted Senators to build up a trusting relationship with MPs and candidates in between election campaigns. Additionally, where duty Senators are of the same faction as the candidate they are assisting the level of co-operation is further improved. Senators can thereby use their central party experience and contacts to advise candidates and MPs, or to approach CHQ about issues as they arise. An example of this would be in the styling of election material whereby the central organisation had an 'on-message'<sup>15</sup> approach, however the local member wanted something with a more regional focus, perhaps more appropriate to their electorate. The Senator can act firstly from the perspective of understanding the central party's campaign focus, but also with knowledge of the issues on the ground within the local election campaign they are operating. Staffers assist with this knowledge base. The fact that major party Senators have strong organisational ties means they are able to first, evaluate whether the local member is straying from party lines and secondly, attempt to formulate the publication in such a way that the organisation would be accepting of it. A Senator's strong central organisational ties increase the

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<sup>15</sup> This is a term both major parties use to describe keeping a coherent campaign message across all districts at an election.

likelihood that the organisation is more accepting of the Senator's compromise than it would be of a Lower House member's independent suggestions. Such roles are not limited to Senators however. Rather they are extended to their staff as their representative in various marginal seats. This sensitive role for staff highlights the importance of having trusting and high quality staffers within Senators' offices.

While the current Government can more effectively campaign using the GMS<sup>16</sup> as well as departmental and ministerial advisers, the Opposition does not have such benefits. It is for this reason Opposition Senators are torn between their need to assist individual candidates become MPs, and the role of assisting the under-resourced central team. This stress on an Opposition Senator's time is reflective of the enormous advantages associated with the incumbency of Government. Governments are more able to use Senators to assist with generating national press, or as part of CHQ where much of their pre-parliamentary background experience lies. This is particularly the case when the Coalition is in Government, given their larger Senate teams of recent years (1987-present).

## **INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE IN CAMPAIGNS**

There are significant advantages associated with incumbency. These advantages include both resources and strategic advantages, and they stretch from state to federal parliaments. As mentioned, major party Senators play varying roles depending on whether they are in Government (with its associated incumbency advantage) or Opposition (with its respective disadvantage).

Incumbency advantages internationally and in Australia have been well-documented (for example, Harrop & Miller 1987, Fenno 1978, Mann & Ornstein 2000, Sayers 1999 and Lovell et al 1995). In Australia, the party in government has the resource advantages of departments, ministerial advisers<sup>17</sup> and the additional Lower House members and staffers making up its parliamentary majority. Such incumbency advantages do not necessarily translate into an advantage in marginal seat campaigning however. Department personnel and resources are not authorised to be used for political campaigning. They often therefore are not.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The previous Keating Government had a similar arm of government known as the National Media Liaison Service.

<sup>17</sup> For further information on ministerial advisers, including their proliferation in recent years, see Holland (2002).

<sup>18</sup> I say 'often' rather than 'always' because confidential interviews have indicated that Departmental Liaison Officers (DLOs) are sometimes used for political campaigning, contra rules regarding department personnel. DLOs are department personnel seconded to ministerial officers for the purpose of improving lines of communication between the ministerial and departmental offices.

Additional Lower House representation and resources come with the added responsibility of individual member representation. Such responsibilities include communicating with constituents, addressing the needs of constituents, and representing the electorate through the course of a parliamentary term. Further, Lower House resources cannot be selectively spread across the state as can Senatorial resources.

Although ministerial staff are not authorised to be used for marginal seat campaigning, confidential interviews have indicated that this practice does occur, more often during the stipulated campaign period.<sup>19</sup> Casual ministerial staffing allowances have been used to the advantage of marginal seats outside the campaign period. A confidential interview indicated casual staff allowances were being used to assist in marginal seats held by factional allies in the lead up to the 2001 election. The interview subject indicated that prior to the 2001 election Tony Abbott was using staffers under his casual staffing allowance to assist with campaigns in the seats of Parramatta and Lindsay, increasing such usage once the election was called. He out-sourced a staffer two days a week to the seat of Parramatta for over a year in the lead up to the 2001 election.

Incumbency can exist at both a macro and micro level. Macro level refers to incumbency of government. That is, across Lower House electorates there is a majority incumbency factor, and it is extended to the advantages that being the government of the day affords. Such advantages include the GMS, Departments, ministerial staff, additional budgeting, and setting policy of the day. It also includes government funded advertising, or control of the increasingly public relations (PR) focused political agenda (Ward, 2002). Micro incumbency advantage is assessed on an electorate by electorate level. In other words, whilst a party may enjoy incumbency advantage on a macro level as the government, a candidate for the Lower House may be competing against the micro incumbency of a sitting member of the opposition. Interviews with Government MPs and staffers have indicated such disadvantage felt by a candidate of the government is heightened by government tendencies to focus on seat retention rather than seat expansion.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has identified the role performed by major party Senators during election campaigns, and the relationship of Senators to the party organisation and the local candidate. The roles of major party Senators during campaigns vary according to differences of state, party and

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<sup>19</sup> Even then, such allocation of ministerial staff most substantially sees them placed in CHQ or state secretariats. They must also continue to perform portfolio duties, and sometimes assist with campaigning within their ministers own seat (if a Lower House MP).

incumbency. Senators are an important conduit between the party organisation centrally and local campaigns. This has the effect of smoothing relations, and ultimately facilitating the campaigning process. It has been shown that the central party tends toward consistency in campaigns across individual member electorates, however, local candidates tend to want to differentiate their campaigns to show local knowledge and local action (as well as being reflective of confidence in their own campaign techniques). This need to differentiate is perhaps partly because of community cynicism towards large scale political campaigns.

Senators have therefore been shown to play an important role in campaigning on a number of levels. First, they serve a vital facilitating role. Secondly, they are able to help muster support at both central and local levels. This is achieved through fundraising, representation at branch and conference meetings to bolster party activism, and via the usage of Senator's staff. Resource disposal by Senators represents a substantial component of their assistance package to the party. This paper has identified Senator entitlements as well as methods of party and Senator usage of those entitlements. Given that such entitlements are not required for personal re-election, and given the pervasive nature of partisanship within major parties, Senators use their resources effectively for party gain during campaigns as well as in between elections, perhaps symptomatic of the permanent campaign.

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