

Statement provided by Senator Rex Patrick for the #OurDemocracy National Integrity Policy Forum

Transparency, accountability and integrity in government and the parliament have been big preoccupations for me as a Senator. Whether it's been pursuing FOI applications, questioning Ministers or bureaucrats at Senate Estimates or challenging the Prime Minister's bogus National Cabinet secrecy claims, I've seen this as a multifaceted business. And you have to plug away at things every day, including Sunday mornings which is when I work on FOIs.

There's a lot of focus on getting a Federal Integrity Commission, one with real teeth. That's absolutely vital. But a Federal ICAC is only part of the picture. There's a huge amount of work to be done in terms of Parliamentary reform, getting better transparency of Members' and Senators' interests, flushing out the connections between lobbyists and policy processes, capping political donations and getting real time disclosure, and fixing our broken FOI system. Just to name a few things.

Yesterday I put out a list of some of my priorities for Parliamentary reform. Truth is, getting even something as obviously needed as a Code of Conduct for Federal MPs will require much effort, regardless of who wins government. And that's my main message tonight. Making progress is hard. It requires sustained effort. Press releases and speeches are important, but what forces progress is doing the hard yards of policy development, pressing the arguments for reform, and most important getting in the ring and landing some blows on obstructive Ministers and recalcitrant public servants. Progress often only comes when you embarrass or humiliate a government. It's only when the political costs rise that they begin to reconsider their self-interested, status quo.

Integrity and accountability need fighters. We have to take the fight to a corrupt establishment if we're to fix our broken and dysfunctional political system.