

By-election: are we on a road to nowhere?

<http://the-terrier.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/video-roads-kellie-donovan.mp4>

Comment – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]T[/dropcap]ake a moment to watch the 49-second video above.

This footage was taken around Merino/Digby by the daughter of **Kellie Donovan**, whose grandchild can be heard whimpering as the car bounces along roads that can only be described as disgraceful.

Kellie uploaded this footage to Facebook ([Fix Our Rural Roads](#)), together with photos of other local roads that have potholes so large, you need to drive on the wrong side of the road to avoid them.

Merino/Digby is just west of Hamilton, but anyone who has driven around the roads in south-west Victoria – including portions of the M1 Princes Highway – will be able to relate to it.

We have all gripped our steering wheels that bit tighter as we bump and slump our way across the dips and potholes that have turned our roads into dangerous obstacle courses.

Why do we have to put up with it?

Below is a photograph taken last Thursday of the archaic Warrnambool-to-Melbourne train service chugging its way toward

Melbourne: it is slow, the carriages are old and often unsuitable for people with disabilities, and it is always crowded. Even the food is terrible.

Why do we have to put up with it?



The Warrnambool-to-Melbourne train service is antiquated in comparison to others around the state.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]
T[/dropcap]he third-world condition of our local roads and major train service are just two of the symptoms of living in a seat that has been taken for granted for decades.

Like Russian dolls, we live in a safe Liberal seat (the state seat of South-West Coast) within a safe Liberal seat (the federal seat of Wannon) and, in my view, this has bred contempt for the locals.

This contempt has been shown not only in the years of neglect of basic infrastructure such as safe roads, but in how our little patch is now treated like some personal family company by the Liberal Party.

We saw this played out in full colour this past week.

The retirement of long-serving South West Coast MP **Dr Denis Napthine** has seen the nomination of his 24-year-old son, **Tom**, as heir apparent and I can't help but think of Rupert Murdoch passing the baton down to his golden sons.

Tom, despite being a novice, will no doubt have the full backing of Wannon MP **Dan Tehan** who owes Denis one for helping him get elected to a plum Liberal seat that he had never even lived in.

Dan, [as he reflected last week](#), was mentored by Denis who, in turn, was mentored by Dan's mother, the late **Marie Tehan**, another Liberal MP. See how it works? You look after my family, I look after yours.



With the Labor Party having pulled the pin on running a candidate for the south-west by-election, Roy Reekie will run as an independent. Image: Facebook.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]T[/dropcap]his neat succession plan, however, hit a hurdle when another arm of the Liberal Party decided to push its own candidate – **Donna Petrovich**.

If this name doesn't ring a bell, don't worry, it shouldn't: Donna is a former MP who represented the area around Macedon, north of Melbourne.

That's right: another Dan Tehan moment, where a candidate is dropped out of the sky into the south-west in the hope of winning a comfy, safe seat.

Three other Liberal hopefuls have also emerged in Warrnambool Mayor **Michael Neoh**, farming advocate **Roma Britnell** and Glenelg Shire councillor **Anita Rank**. (The Liberal Party will preselect its candidate on Sept 20 – update [Michael Neoh has since withdrawn](#) and will now run for The Nationals).

And where is the Labor Party in all this?

Despite it being a rare opportunity where the sitting MP is retiring, they have flip flopped all over the place as to whether they will even bother to run a candidate.

As it stands, the ALP's **Roy Reekie** is gearing up to contest the seat for a fifth time, but this time as an independent. (**Michael McCluskey** is also running again as an independent, while The Greens are yet to select a candidate (*update*: The Greens will again be represented by Thomas Campbell.)

And somewhere in the middle of all this internal squabbling and manoeuvring and climbing over each other for pre-selection is...you.



The heir apparent: Tom Naphthine, son of Dr Denis Naphthine, will run for Liberal preselection for the seat of South-West Coast. Image: Denis Naphthine/Twitter.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]S[/dropcap]o what do *you* want?

I know what I want.

I want our seat to become marginal, where no party, or person, can ever assume that they will be in power for year, after year, after year.

Instead, every election should be a hard-fought battle, rather than a fait accompli.

I also want a candidate who has principles and sticks to them.

Just last week we saw Michael Neoh say that he supported marriage equality, [only to run the other way](#) when he was asked by the Byron Shire Mayor to formalise that support. (Mr Neoh has not only since changed his stance on supporting gay marriage publicly, but changed political parties!)

And I want a leader who loves our part of the world and will fight for it, without becoming blinded by their own ambition to be a Minister, or Premier, or the well-paid chair of some parliamentary committee.

Is it too much to hope for?

I hope not, because without these things, I fear that we will continue to be the poor cousins of the state, rumbling along on our slow trains and broken roads to nowhere.

[box]The State Government is undertaking a state-wide review of its public transport systems, including for the south-west. You can also have your say online via [this link here](#).

[/box]

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