

Sweet potatoes: how Purcell pushed Britnell over the line

James Purcell, having tried his darnedest to edge Roma Britnell out of her seat, ended up being the one who kept her in it.

Ten local takeaways from the state election

Ten local takeaways from the amazing state election.

Purcell, potatoes and why the Liberals will win (again)

Election: The Liberals are shaping up for yet another win in the south-west, but can we make it at least close?

Milking it: how Crs Neoh and

Gaston can be councillors AND wanna-be MPs



Former Warrnambool mayor, Warrnambool City Council and ALP candidate Kylie Gaston in full campaign mode. Image: Kylie Gaston ALP for South West Facebook page.

By Carol Altmann

Here is a legal loophole that is so big, you could drive a truck through it: you can be a local councillor **AND** run for parliament at the same time.

That is, of course, unless your council draws up a policy that says you can't.

The Warrnambool City Council has no such policy.

This is why former Warrnambool mayor Kylie Gaston could announce way back *in May* that she was running for Labor at the next state election on November 24 which, at that time, was

still six whole months away.

And it is why former Warrnambool mayor Michael Neoh could announce this week that he will run as an ~~Liberal National~~ Independent at the same election, which is still two months away.

Neither he nor Cr Gaston have to step aside.

In fact, technically, they don't have to step aside until nominations for the state election close on November 8. (Independent nominations close on November 9, so Cr Neoh gets an extra day).

That is another six weeks away.



Having attempted Liberal preselection in 2015, then running as a National candidate, Cr Michael Neoh is now running as an independent in the 2018 state election.

The current Local Government Act allows this, largely because it still hasn't caught up with the modern way of doing things, where loads of wanna-be MPs are launching their political careers via the grassroots of local councils.

There is nothing wrong with a person running for local council with a view to bigger things – that's called ambition – but there is a massive conflict of interest when you decide

to run for a state election and hold on to your council spot.

When are you speaking to the media as a councillor? When are you speaking as a candidate? Do the public spot the difference? (I doubt it).

And how can your council profile, all of the free publicity and the behind-the-scenes-access to council business not be anything but a massive boost in an election campaign?

Michael Neoh has been in this territory before, back in 2015, when he ran as an Independent Liberal National candidate while still Mayor of Warrnambool.

The council didn't ask him to step aside, so he didn't.

Here is what Cr Neoh said to me in an email at the time:

"I have a campaign car that I use and also non-council equipment.

I am following the MAV policy in regards to taking leave of absence and I do not use mayoral invited functions to campaign.

If I meet with stakeholders outside of Council duties and as a candidate, I make it very clear that I am an election candidate and are not representing council."

Having seen Cr Neoh get away with it, Cr Gaston has since been following the same map, with her Labor-Party-emblazoned car parked in the WCC carpark while she performs, as Cr Neoh did in 2015, her council duties.

Again, neither Cr Gaston nor Cr Neoh are breaking any rules or laws, they are simply doing what they are allowed to get away with.

Like any savvy politician, they are milking every opportunity to maintain their public profiles, and the council is a perfect platform.

The Victorian Local Government Association is on to this.

It put [out eight guidelines for councils](#), asking that they develop their own rules to manage councillors who run for state or federal parliament.

The guideline that nails it is this: **“The taking of leave of absence immediately after nominating as a candidate until the conclusion of the election campaign”.**

Simple, huh?

Don't expect the councillors themselves to suggest the Warrnambool City Council write such a policy. Two of our seven already benefit from *not* having such a thing in place.

It is up to ratepayers – again – to say this is not good enough, that we are not interested in subsidising councillors' political aspirations and that we want their mind firmly on the job of running our council, not how they can move on from it.

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Why I am running: Michael McCluskey, Indpt



There is not just one vet running for South-West Coast at the next state election. Independent Michael McCluskey plans to bring his science and economic skills to the political arena. Image: Supplied.

[box]In the lead-up to the Nov 29 state election, *Bluestone Magazine* invited candidates from the three major parties – [Liberal](#), [ALP](#) and [Greens](#) – to tell us why they were running for the seat of South-West Coast. Michael McCluskey is an Independent candidate who contacted us with his response to this same question. He has chosen a question and answer style.[/box]

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[dropcap]hy have you decided to run?

I have held a long term frustration with the way our political

system operates, particularly in regard to the lack of science-based, 'bigger picture' thinking amongst our politicians. The quote 'A statesperson thinks about the next generation whilst a politician thinks about the next election' rings very true to me.

What skills do you believe you can offer the community and the electorate?

I believe my diverse background, in particular my strong grounding in science, would be an invaluable asset to our current political system. Initially I worked as a dairy farm hand for 3 years before joining the Federal public service as an Employment Officer.

After leaving this role I then went to spend the next 24 years as a veterinarian, serving the agricultural industry and then later the equine (horse) industry. I have also completed extra university study with units in Psychology and Economics, and obtained entry into the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists.

What are the main issues affecting our community?

I believe the main issue affecting us is the level of violence within the community. Until we more effectively deal with this issue our four main well beings – economic, social, environmental and animal well being – will never realise their full potential.



Violence in our community, including family violence, must be tackled if we are to progress across a range of areas. Image: www.stylemagazine.com.

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[/dropcap]hat other issues are important to you?

Health care– Currently our pets and racehorses receive access to a better healthcare system than what most humans do, particularly in relation to surgery waiting lists. A well funded and wisely operated health system, with timely access to needed care will bring greater economic and social well being both in the short and long term.

Education– If we look at any community throughout the world there is little doubt access to education is a key determinant of how well a society functions, both economically and socially. Whether one takes a trade, university or other creative pathway, we need to do all we can to maximise access to these pathways, including restoring the TAFE system.

Public transport– an efficient, well funded public transport system, along with the provision of quality roads will produce

a significant boost to the economic, social and environmental well being of all our communities.

Fracking for natural gas mining— the known short term and unknown long term risks associated with injecting many millions of litres of chemically laden fluids into the ground/aquifers outweighs the potential benefits. It took politicians nearly 80 years to acknowledge lead in petrol was harmful to our children. For the sake of our grandchildren we can't afford to wait another 80 years on this issue.

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[/dropcap]**hy didn't you run through a political party?**

My concern is once in the party system, the ability to speak one's mind and act with one's head and heart can be stifled, which for me defeats the purpose of being in politics in the first place. If we can't vote with our conscious on every issue, are we really being true to ourselves and to our electorate?

How can we fund these important issues you have raised?

Reducing wastage within our system is one key component. \$100 wisely spent is better than \$1000 poorly spent. Tapping into some of the billions of dollars entering our superannuation system presents an opportunity as well. It would help fund vital projects in healthcare, education and public transport, as well giving super funds a safe, alternative asset class in which to invest in. In the 'chase for yield' there is already concerns about asset prices being pushed beyond fair value due to pent up investment demand.

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