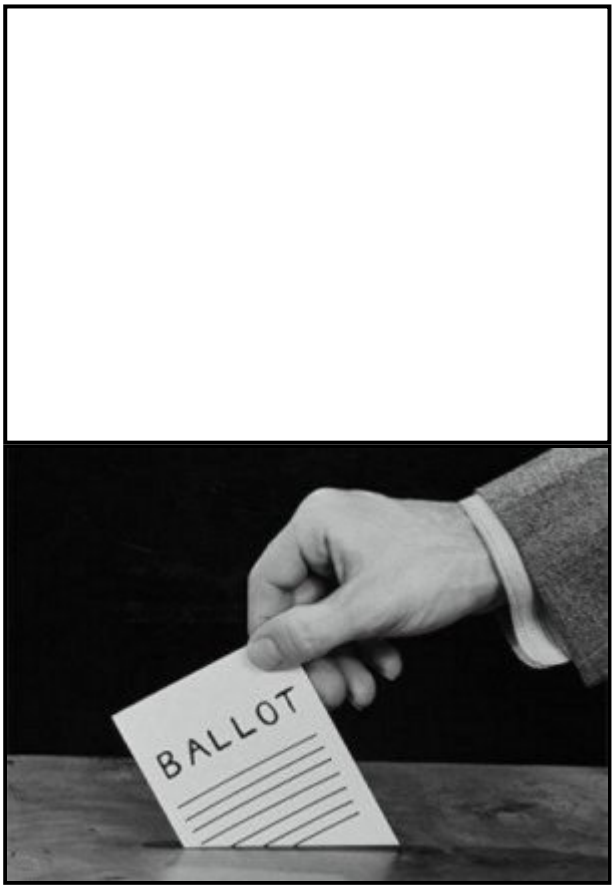
Why I’m voting for Barling

Description



Opinion – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] I [/dropcap]MAGINE living in a place where an election was held every three years and, no matter how many candidates ran, the same party kept winning? Would you call this a healthy democracy? Well, we live in a place just like that and it is called the federal seat of Wannon.

For the past ~~58~~ 61 years – that is 10 years longer than I have been alive – the Liberal Party has won Wannon.

In the past ~~58~~ 61 years, there have been ~~**22**~~ **23** federal elections – the ~~23rd~~ 24th will be held on Saturday – and, in that time, just **three** different Liberals have held the seat of Wannon: Malcolm Fraser, David Hawker and Dan Tehan.

It is not surprising that the Liberal Party has come to treat Wannon as a soft landing for its next generation of MPs. Dan Tehan, who seems like a nice enough guy, was parachuted into the seat of Wannon four years ago.

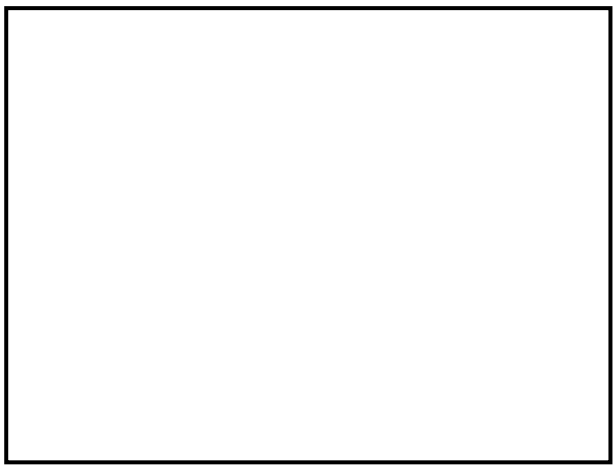
He had little connection to south-west Victoria, but bought a property near Hamilton to try and fast-track his status as a local. Is that all it takes for the Liberal Party to secure this seat? Judging by the 2010 election result, it appears so.

> And while the Wannon electorate has fallen into line year after year, many of these same voters can be heard complaining – yes, complaining – that they are being taken for granted.

Of course this contempt for safe seats is not confined to the Liberal Party, they all do it, but this election Wannon voters have an opportunity to draw a line in the sand and demand a real contest.

With the help of the redrawn boundaries, Wannon is now defined as a ‘marginal’ seat, although it still requires an almost a 6 per cent swing to change hands.

And, for the first time in a long time, the ALP has a strong local candidate in Warrnambool secondary school teacher **Michael Barling** who has had time to build his profile and who has committed an enormous amount of energy toward winning the seat. He has done this despite the antics of federal Labor making it increasingly impossible for him to win: he has not given up.



I am not normally a Labor voter, but I am going to vote for Barling because he represents to me what politics should be about.

It is about presenting voters with a real choice, not a fait accompli.

It is about supporting a candidate who knows and loves the electorate because he or she has spent most of their life here, not because they have been forced to relocate in the lead up to an election.

And it's about having a candidate with a strong moral compass who is prepared to challenge the party line on issues like asylum seekers and gay rights, rather than follow it blindly.

> Above all, however, it's about electing an MP who will continually fight hard for the seat, whether in Government or in Opposition, knowing that they will be held fully accountable at each election.

This will happen if Wannon shifts even further into marginal territory after Saturday: that's the sort of democracy I want to see in action.

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Author
carol