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don't contract out my job



Political lobbying guide for schools

Background

In February, the Queensland Government announced that they were seeking to build seven new schools under “Public Private Partnership” agreements that include the contracting out of cleaning and hard and soft maintenance for the next thirty years.

The introduction of contracting out for building and maintenance of any schools poses a threat to all school workers, from cleaners and schools officers, to teacher aides, administration staff and teachers. Contracting out removes the autonomy and accountability of schools and hands it to multi-million dollar consortiums.

Under private arrangements, in Australia and abroad, companies ultimately seek to do more with less, for less, in order to maximise their profit margins. This leads to dirty and unsafe schools, and unfair wages and conditions.

What's more, educational outputs are not increased.

That is why LHMU and QPSU members are campaigning with school communities to fight these plans.

So why a political campaign?

Although Education Queensland has wanted to implement contracting out arrangements for decades, it has been the Queensland Government who have announced this latest move, despite campaigning against a similar program back in late 1990's.

This is a political decision, and as such we need to influence the decision-makers in order to make change.

The Positively Public lobbying kit

This kit has been developed so that we can exert maximum political pressure in this campaign.

Political pressure does not start at the top, it starts at the grass roots level. That's why union members across the state are forming delegations to go and see state Labor MPs. This is the first step in our campaign to stamp out contracting out in Queensland schools.

This kit should provide you with the tools you need to arrange a meeting with your local MP, present our case at the meeting, and report back the outcomes of the meeting.

Together we can make a real difference.

Political lobbying- 4 essential tips

All successful political campaigns have a few things in common. By following a few simple steps we can maximise our chances of success.

Tip one

ALWAYS lobby decision makers: NEVER lobby oppositions.

Governments have the power to make decisions, oppositions do not. As tempting as it can be to seek out opposition support we should refrain. The best an opposition can generally do is turn our issues into political footballs. Very rarely does a campaign succeed if this happens.

We need to control our campaign, not politicians, and to do that we need to influence those who have the power to make decisions.

Tip two

ALWAYS be polite, professional and courteous.

No matter how outrageous the decision a government has taken, or their attitude towards the people who are campaigning against them, you are never going to influence someone by being abusive or impolite.

Tip three

PRACTICE makes perfect.

(Or in our case, when protesting Public Private Partnership plans: Prior Preparation Prevents Pretty Poor Performance and Provides Political Power for Positively Public People).

It is understandable for people to be nervous or anxious before a meeting. In fact, it would be rare if people weren't a little nervous. The best way to overcome these nerves and have a successful meeting is to practice what you are going to say beforehand.

Tip four

TAKE notes.

It is very hard to remember everything that is said during a meeting. It is a good idea to assign someone the role of note-taker.

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Meeting notes

For our campaign to be successful, it is important that everyone across the state is going in with the same message and asking for the same thing. That is why we have developed the following meeting notes for people to follow.

Introduction

Start off by introducing the group and the fact that you are:

- Concerned about the plan the state government has announced to contract out school cleaning.
- Worried about the effect this will have on our jobs and wages, and also on other workers across the state.
- Want the Member's support in our campaign to stop contracting out in schools.

Concerns

Explain to the MP what members are concerned about:

- Why is the government supporting this scheme when they have previously opposed contracting out?
- Contract workers can't provide the same service as do in-house staff. Schools have less control over standards, workers are forced to do more work for less money. Everywhere this has happened it means lower quality.
- Parents, staff and principals believe that Ed Queensland has a duty to maintain high standards in these schools, as well as basic safety and hygiene. We've seen the evidence of these schemes in NSW and WA and schools are not happy with it.
- We know the department wants to save money, but it shouldn't be at the expense of schools, and it shouldn't hurt workers' jobs.
- Workers on contract wages are overworked and underpaid. We want to support our families.
- Contracting out in these seven schools opens the door to more contracting schemes in other schools. If there are no plans to extend this scheme, why is it being rolled out in the first place?
- If private contractors win contracts for new schools across the state, what will the government say to them when they start pushing for jobs at existing schools?

3. What we are looking for

Tell the member what we are looking for:

- We want the state government to scrap this plan as the Borbidge government did with a similar scheme in 1996.
- We are counting on your support since we believe this affects all of the state schools in your electorate

Then ask the question:

-Can we count on your support?

Things they are likely to say

It is always good to stay ahead of the pack. These are a few things we think they might say, or have already said.

Contracting out is only going to occur in seven schools in the South East corner

- We have seen almost everywhere else that once these arrangements have been brought in at a handful of schools they flow on fairly quickly.
- Cleaning companies see school contracts as a way of making millions and millions of dollars, guaranteed for the next thirty years. They will be seeking to put as much pressure on government to replicate arrangements across the sector.
- Many schools are getting older and are in need of repair. Doing PPP arrangements for school refurbishments is one way that EQ will likely expand the program.
- Contracting companies will run "economy of scale" arguments, saying that since they are doing one or two schools in an area, it would be cheaper and more efficient for them to do all the schools in an area. That will leave all schools in danger of contracting out.

Principals will be able to focus on education rather than administration

- The fact is that Principals often spend little time on matters relating to maintenance and grounds already, this is usually done by school business managers (registrars) and administration staff.
- Furthermore the fact that principals will now have to deal with outside managers will mean more drama. A problem that would normally be fixed by the principal talking directly to a schools officer will now have more links in between. If something goes wrong or there is a dispute, the processes will be more difficult to rectify as Departmental policy wouldn't apply.
- Even if that was the case, which it isn't, if it is good enough for principals to be able to focus on education rather than administration, why isn't it good enough for other schools outside of Brisbane? Does this mean that the Government would like to see the contracting out expanded to all schools?

This is just for 7 schools, and the rest is business as usual

- The government and Education Queensland have not addressed the issue of flow-on risks.
- Furthermore, the more schools under contract, the less bargaining power workers have, especially if the private contractors cut staff and wages as they often do.

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