



MAYORAL MEMO - 14 DECEMBER 2022

Being in government involves a fine line of delivering on what people want and what people need.

Think of a kindergarten class. The teacher walks in and tells the class that each day they are going to hold a vote to decide what to eat at 'little lunch' and the entire class must participate in both the vote and the outcome. The options presented are apples; oranges; ice cream; lollies or chips washed down with soft drink; savoured milk; plain milk or water. The class votes and on the first day the democratic process delivers chips and soft drink. Democracy in action is giving the kids what they want, but the kindergarten teacher has more knowledge about the health outcomes of poor eating choices and should give the children what they need.

Move that overly simplistic example up to our modern world. We now have the technology that it would be relatively easy to remove elected representatives from our democratic process and make every decision by a popular vote. Every decision would be exactly what the people wanted. How could anyone complain about the outcomes?

Look at our modern workforce. Over the last century, our workforce has delivered specialised workers to the point where we now know more and more about less and less.

When we visit a GP to look at a lump on our leg, we might receive a referral to have a radiographer perform an ultrasound. A specialist would give their opinion of those results before we visit a different specialist to give a diagnosis. When deciding what to do, we wouldn't contemplate taking it to a democratic vote of the public. We would rely on the background knowledge of our chosen specialists to deliver the best possible outcome.

I look at decisions by elected representatives in a similar fashion. Before a decision is made at any level of government, a huge amount of information has been presented and discussed. It often has been in the public domain and opinions have been expressed by the public. There might be workshops or briefings. Hundreds of pages of information are often absorbed. When it comes time to make a decision, all of that background study and information and public opinion combines to form a decision. Then the front-page news delivers a populist opinion about a 'terrible decision by government' without the benefit of all of that background information and ignores the nuances that might be involved with a decision.

We elect our representatives and empower them to do the work necessary to understand the long-term ramifications of decisions to be made – and then trust them to deliver on that promise. Representatives always want to hear opinions from the public but it is sensible to consider the many pieces of background information that might go to making a final decision.

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