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Inquiry needed following Exclusive Brethren election funding revelations

Senator Milne, 20th January 2007

The Howard government must order an independent inquiry into third party election funding following revelations that one small private company, Willmac Enterprises, claims to be the sole source of Exclusive Brethren funding for anti-Green and pro-Liberal election campaign material, the Australian Greens said today.

Greens Senator Christine Milne said the revelations, coupled with Prime Minister John Howard's growing association with the religious right, raise concerns about the lack of transparency of political donations, particularly in the lead up to this year's federal election.

"The Exclusive Brethren claim that their election donations are small donations made spontaneously by individuals and that there is no coordination by the church of their political involvement in election campaigns," Senator Milne said in Hobart.

"Yet here we have a company registered for the period of the 2004 federal election campaign for the purpose of election donations and there is no way the community can know who contributed money to the company for the purpose.

"What is the relationship between Willmac Enterprises' secretary Mark Mackenzie and the Liberal Party? The Electoral Return states that Willmac Enterprises developed electoral advertisements, produced campaign materials and engaged in direct mailing, something for which it appears Mr Mackenzie has no expertise.

"I believe that the Liberal Party was involved in writing and placing the material as was certainly the case in South Australia and Tasmania.

"Prime Minister Howard continues to refuse to disclose the meetings he has with the Exclusive Brethren as have all his ministers in spite of the fact that the extreme sect receives generous government funding for its schools and is exempt from industrial relations laws.

"Prime Minister Howard is developing closer and closer ties with the extreme religious right in Australia and he must reveal the nature and extent of these relationships."

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