

LETTERS

The dysfunctional Senate cries out for reform

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The musical chair games in the Senate have been farcical (“Senate needs to rise above this squalid dysfunction”, 20/6). And, irrespective of the rules for their party’s leaderships, so too have the revolving door games played with the office of the prime minister.

Paul Kelly despairs of the Senate noting, “loyalty, fidelity — forget it”, but that observation applies equally to the House of Representatives.

Nonetheless, the man both houses throw stones at, Tony Abbott, tabled a worthy suggestion on Senate reform some time ago — that a referendum be put to the people so that legislation rejected twice in the Senate, three months apart, would go to a joint sitting, not a double dissolution election. It’s worth a shot, isn’t it, Malcolm Turnbull?

Mandy Macmillan, Singleton, NSW

Paul Kelly may be right to note that no Senate since federation has seen so many breaches of Section 44 of the Constitution, with 16 of 76 senators disqualified (so far), but his conclusion that this reflects the special degeneracy of this term is disputable. There has never before been such scrutiny of whether individual senators might be breaching Section 44. There is strong reason to fear that the situation was far worse in past decades, even if the chambers in question were less dysfunctional.

Patrick Ball, Fern Tree, Tas

Why is it immoral for the government to cut taxes for the rich when the rich pay most of the taxes? (“Shorten sets up class-war poll”, 20/6).

By refusing to back the government’s \$144 billion in personal income tax cuts, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten is forcing wage earners, producers and consumers to transfer a portion of their sovereignty as economic actors to politicians and bureaucrats. The goal of tax policy should be to encourage large numbers of future-oriented people to forgo present consumption and to work, save and invest. This leads to the creation of a larger capital base, which improves the productivity of workers. But Bill Shorten and shadow treasurer Chris Bowen both agree that it is up to them to determine how much of your income ought to be theirs to squander.

Victor Diskordia, McKellar, ACT

In her usual nervous, quavering vocal style, Pauline Hanson said something in the Senate yesterday which actually made sense. She said comparing the competing income tax cuts of Coalition and Labor was like comparing mobile phone plans.

The government and the opposition have copied the methods of many businesses by constructing policies which are difficult to compare easily. For instance, one key requirement is to understand the different ways of calculating the “average” wage in Australia. The Coalition uses the mean, Labor prefers the median.

Depending on which method you use will determine whether you are a middle income or a high income Australian and how the competing tax cuts will affect you. Time to brush up on some high school maths.

Rod Wise, Surrey Hills, Vic

May I make one criticism of your otherwise outstanding editorial (“Aspiring to greater heights in crucial policy contests”, 20/6)? — namely, the unmentioned elephant in the room. You rightly ask why, given its potential “advantages on crucial policy issues”, the government “seems to be failing in efforts to convince voters of its merit” — the most recent example being on border protection policy, where “the Coalition should be unassailable”. More generally, you “see far too little urgency and vigour in its advocacy”, with “an alarming torpor about the Coalition’s efforts”.

That unmentioned elephant is, of course, the leadership of Malcolm Turnbull, whose performance (exemplified by his policy-wise directionless record in losing 14 seats at the last election) underlies each of your criticisms. The need for a new (or even restored) leader capable of addressing them has now become inescapable if we are to be spared the disaster of a Labor government after the next election. There is no alternative.

John Stone, Lane Cove, NSW

The dispiriting thing about federal politics right now is that so many people acknowledge its paralysis and dysfunction while at the same time assuming there is no solution. Voters created this mess, and they can empower a solution — by giving one major party a clear majority in both houses of parliament.

K. Inman, Brisbane, Qld