



The Advocate

EDITORIAL || Eslake is right: Liberals should make bigger moves

EDITORIAL DECEMBER 3 2021



PLAYING IT SAFE: Premier Peter Gutwein leads a government rightly criticised for not being prepared to attempt major reform.

Celebrated economist Saul Eslake is usually on the money, and he certainly is with his critique of the Gutwein government.

Mr Eslake says the Liberals under Will Hodgman and his successor have done fairly well at keeping the state ticking along.

Where they are failing, he argues, is in using their time in government to achieve reforms of benefit to Tasmania.

Naturally, the government begs to differ, with Premier Peter Gutwein falling back on those well-worn lines of "delivering a strong plan" and "securing Tasmania's future".

<https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/7537165/too-scared-to-reform-tasmania/>

It's noteworthy that the only specific example of reform he mentions is the extension of high schools to Years 11 and 12, a policy the Liberals took to the 2014 election.

Have they run out of new ideas?

Supporters of the government will ask what those advocating reform want to see.

Mr Eslake offered a few examples, from improving our underperforming education system to an overhaul of state taxes, and, an oldie but a goodie, local government reform.

Clearly, the issue isn't a lack of ideas; it's a lack of will on the part of a government that has everything going for it.

If you told the Liberals after they took office in 2014 that they will win not only a second but a third term in their own right, they would have been sceptical.

Tasmania has historically been a Labor state, and yet the Libs are still in government, with more than three years until the next election and an opposition that should not inspire fear.

It's questionable why Mr Gutwein and his colleagues are so reticent to try to leave a lasting legacy for this state.

In response to COVID, they've not been shy about making tough decisions. On Friday, even announcing big fines for people who go into a pub for a beer without proof of vaccination on hand.

Yet they cowered when Labor refused to commit to an approach to council mergers aimed at minimising the political heat, and will likely achieve little on that front.

As we try to move on from the pandemic, there is no better time for reform.

We can only hope the Liberals will find some ticker over summer.