



Getting votes with your knuckles



Lindsay Tanner

AS a politician ever knocked on your door?

Over the years, I have doorknocked thousands of people.

I've doorknocked my electorate. I've doorknocked for other candidates and I've doorknocked in union elections.

I actually enjoy it. I know you're thinking I must be some kind of weirdo, but I do. It's a great way to find out what's really going on.

Sure, it's got some downsides. I've been bitten by a german shepherd. I was wearing thongs, so I guess I was asking for it.

I've sometimes had to chase escaping pets. If you've accidentally let someone's fox terrier escape and it gets hit by a car, they're not very likely to vote for you.

Weather can also be a problem. I've doorknocked in driving rain with a broken umbrella, and I've doorknocked in 40 degree heat.

In each case, the effect was the same. Looking like a drowned rat might have won me a few sympathy votes, but I don't think it was very good for my image.

There are other pitfalls. Shift workers don't appreciate getting woken up. People holding crying babies aren't wild about answering the door. And most

people prefer eating dinner to talking to a politician.

There are physical traps too. Modern flats are a nightmare.

You've got no idea how stupid it feels conducting an earnest political conversation through an intercom.

Sometimes, it's really tricky just getting to someone's front door, because you can't work out how to open the front gate.

People's reactions can be amusing. Every now and then I've unwittingly stumbled into a party and been obliged to join in. So instead of a strip-o-gram, or a bloke in a gorilla suit, the novelty act at the party is the local MP.

I've even played the piano on a few occasions. Sometimes, I've ended up helping blokes fix their cars, or paint the front fence. I just hope my willingness to pitch in compensates for my lack of expertise.

Some people are quite overwhelmed when they open the door and their federal MP is on the doorstep. They seem to think I've singled them out for a special pastoral visit.

THERS are grumpy that I haven't turned up earlier. They don't quite realise that with 60,000 households in my electorate it could take decades for me to get around to everyone.

Doorknocking is quite ex-

hausting. Once you've done three or four hours, your brain starts to scramble. It's a bit like what I imagine speed dating is like.

A few hours of concentrating hard and trying to make a good impression on dozens of different people can be quite draining.

But it's all worth it. Doorknocking is the best way to connect with all those people who never email their MP, never ring talkback radio and never write to the papers.

Political debate is unduly influenced by people who make the loudest noise.

Politicians who only reflect the views of those who shout from the rooftops aren't doing their jobs properly.

If your local representatives aren't doorknocking, that's all they'll hear. So, if you want them to have a deeper understanding of constituents' concerns, get them to knock on a few doors.

Once they've worked out the tricky lock on the front gate, avoided the savage dog on the veranda and knocked back a couple of stubbies at the party, it's a piece of cake.

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