

Licia Heath

Independent



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Wentworth by-election wrap up – views of Licia Heath, Independent Candidate, 28/10/18

I'm staring at the water at Bronte beach - the beach that had so much coverage in recent weeks as it was used as the constant backdrop for the Prime Minister and his Liberal candidate, Dave Sharma. I've lived here since 2003 and it was an odd feeling watching the surf lifesaving club I volunteer at get raised to the national stage while I was lesser-known, but still pounding the pavement door-knocking and speaking at candidate forums. As I stare at the water and absorb the journey of the last seven weeks, I feel the need to share my experience of running in the Wentworth by-election.

My initial sentiment is gratitude. To see hundreds of people mobilise behind me and the issues I was running on as an Independent candidate was a truly humbling experience. My volunteers sent me photos and encouragement throughout the pre-poll period and on election day and I tried to return the favour by dedicating myself to the changes I think we need in Australian politics. The constant feedback I received from other candidates and party volunteers throughout the campaign was how impressed they were with our team. I have to agree - our team was truly Wentworthy.

The second experience I want to convey is what I witnessed as the consequence of increased political engagement in Wentworth – change for good. As the seat became more marginal, the feeling in the electorate was palpable. People were saying to me that, for the first time, they felt their vote might actually make a difference. That their views may finally be heard. A politically dis-engaged constituency was activating before my eyes and people who'd never involved themselves in the political process were now engaged. I was privileged to watch that unfold and it gave me hope that our democratic process is not broken, only sick, and that the antidote is for the public to re-engage in Australian politics.

The final thought I want to convey is around how one defines a win. There is no doubt in my mind that the presence of a second Independent voice on the candidate stage in the Wentworth by-election not only had an impact on how other candidates crafted their policies, but also gave the electorate comfort that they weren't alone in their views. Wentworth voters had felt an increasing disconnect between their socially progressive views and how they were being represented by their local Federal MP. Malcolm Turnbull may have been liked, but the level to which his own views had been compromised had never been more visible, and nowhere was that noticed more than in Wentworth.

My policies didn't change throughout the by-election and that was noticed by many. To give you some insight into the process, each candidate had to complete a variety of questionnaires from special interest groups so those groups could determine which candidates to support on election day. GetUp ranked the Greens, myself and Kerryn Phelps the highest with regard to our climate change policy, I was listed with five other candidates as a "Strong Supporter of the ABC" by ABCFriends and I reached the highest level of "Elder God" by the Smashed Avocado Movement (a political movement focussed on a number of reforms including housing affordability and asylum seekers). Combined, this was the highest ranking of any individual candidate in the by-election. I was also preferenced first by the Science Party and the Animal Justice party.

I remember sitting with a dear friend before I launched my campaign and chatting about what "a win" would look like. Besides the obvious answer of becoming the next member for Wentworth, I answered that getting policy changes on key issues such as climate change reform, asylum seeker policy and public school funding would also be a win.

I'm proud to have helped set the agenda in Wentworth and I'm proud of my volunteers who joined me. We look forward to that agenda being put in place in the coming months. But for now, I'm back at the beach being consoled by my friends for my election loss. Yet for some reason I can't seem to wipe the smile off my face.