PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA, ACT 2600
TEL: (02) 6277 7111
ABN: 18 526 287 740

16 NOV 2021

Mr Matthew Landauer and Ms Katherine Szuminska
contact@theyvoteforyou.org.au

Dear Mr Landauer and Ms Szuminska

They Vote For You is an important platform and we commend Open Australia Foundation's initiative enabling voters to easily access parliamentarians' voting record on matters significant to them. However, we have concerns that the *They Vote For You* platform is misrepresenting how we vote, in some instances quite significantly. We acknowledge that this is not intentional and can attribute several reasons to why this may occur.

1. If fewer than five Members place a dissenting vote on a matter then a formal count is not held and the question is resolved in the affirmative under Standing Order 127. The dissenting votes are recorded in *Hansard* and the *Votes and Proceedings*, but are not picked up by *They Vote for You*. Dissenting votes are often crossbenchers expressing disagreement with the two major parties. For example on 25 March 2021 the House divided on the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Amendment (Extension and Other Measures) Bill 2021* and only Mr Bandt, Dr Haines, Ms Steggall and Mr Wilkie voted 'No' and the question was resolved in the affirmative.

2. The Opposition routinely move second reading amendments to Government bills that are not directly relevant to the substantive matter of the Bill before Parliament, and are often used for political purposes or as a procedural tactic. This is of course their right, but it greatly expands the substantive matter of the debate. The effect of votes on second reading amendments are also materially different to votes on Bills themselves, which reflect a Members position on specific proposed legislation as opposed to a general proposition. It seems that *They Vote For You* records a vote for or against these second reading amendments in the same manner as votes are recorded for Bills.

This distorts our voting record on some topics quite significantly, and does not accurately reflect the question we are voting on. For example, the Opposition's second reading amendment on the *Health Insurance Amendment (Prescribed Fees) Bill 2021* was "whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House urges the government to implement policies to better protect Australians' Health". Further, second reading amendments moved to the *National Skills Commissioner Bill 2020* concentrated on funding for vocational education, rather than the Bill itself which established a new statutory office of the National Skills Commissioner. This may mislead people on a Members' views on health policy or vocational education funding.

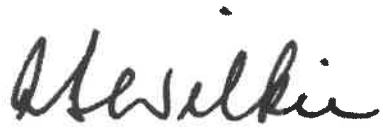
3. Due to COVID-19, remote participation in Parliament has been necessary but regrettably, the Government and Opposition have done a deal that prevents crossbenchers from pairing in the House of Representatives. This means that crossbenchers participating remotely cannot have their votes cast in the moment during a division. However, we do have an arrangement with the Speaker that our voting intention on each issue is tabled at the end of each sitting. This is not recorded by *They Vote For You* and instead we are recorded as voting with the majority or as absent.

4. Finally, where there are multiple votes on the same Bill or issue, some consideration should be given to the effect of the legislation or division. For example with the Cashless Debit Card, there were four divisions on the trial card but only two divisions on the decision to make the card a permanent feature of the social security system. Some crossbenchers supported the trial in order to gather evidence for whether it worked or not and when it was decided that it was ineffective voted against making it a permanent feature. Despite this their overall record shows that they voted 'for' the card because the number of divisions on the trial outweigh the number on the permanent card. The summary text written by *They Vote For You* therefore does not represent the true substance of the vote.

We strongly believe it is important for the public to have full and transparent access to Members' voting records in plain English. We also believe that the public is best served when this information is as accurate as possible, and reflects the true workings of the Parliament and the votes we cast on behalf of our constituents. This would be best achieved if *They Vote For You* accommodate the above concerns. Our offices would be pleased to work with you to achieve this.

We ask that you review this website to ensure that our voting record is accurately represented and that voters are correctly informed.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Wilkie MP
Member for Clark

Rebekah Sharkie MP
Member for Mayo

Dr Helen Haines MP
Member for Indi

Zali Steggall OAM MP
Member for Warringah