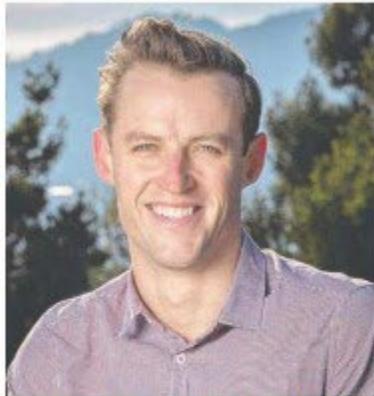


While scrutiny on equal gender representation is in



City of Hobart Councillor Ryan Posselt

In the build-up to yet another state election, I wonder, where are the youth? Representation is really important to shape our collective future, yet so frequently it is being shaped by people out of touch with the needs, desires and dreams of young people.

There has been increasing pressure from the community to have equal gender representation, with some parties introducing quotas to ensure equal representation and equal opportunity for both sexes.

But no one is talking about the

Average age of the population is 37, but average age in parliament is 50, writes Ryan Posselt

equally important notion of representation in age.

In the federal parliament the average age is just over 50 years old, yet the average age of the Australian population is 37.

In fact, just six people under 30 have served in the Australian House of Representatives in the past 120 years.

In recent times, Wyatt Roy was elected at age 20, while Christian Zebra was elected aged 25, in 1998. Then you need to track back to Andrew Jones (22) elected in 1966 and Charles Falkinder (25) in 1946. Finally, Hubert Lazzarini (25) and Edwin Corby (22) in 1919 and 1918 respectively.

In Hobart City municipality, where

the average age is 37, your council representation is skewed toward 50s and 60s, with some members sitting almost as long as I've been alive.

In reality, when I turn 37 in October, there will not be any elected members below the average age of the city, with only Will Coats (37) and I under 40.

So why is it we don't see younger politicians?

Party machinery is often set up to favour people who have been around for a while, have the support of members and can get the numbers.

Take Eric Abetz's recent

focus, it's time to consider equal age representation

nomination for preselection as an example. Surely there are people within the Liberal Party who want to step up and be given a chance to make their contribution. Yet, they will be overlooked in favour of the older statesman, who has already had his say for the past 30 years.

The resources required to run in any election are significant. It's not unusual to see personal expenditure of \$50,000 for state and federal elections, which most young people don't have lying around.

However, councils are a wonderful place to start. At the last election,

some councils in Tasmania didn't even have an election because so few people put up their hand. So, it is possible to get elected with limited means and have your say.

Why is it so important? At every level of government, elected members are making decisions that impact our future. And who has the longest future ahead of them? Our young people!

So why don't we want the people who have the most skin in the game to be a part of decision-making?

Why don't we allow 16-18 year olds to vote if they want to? Maybe this

would result in the young, energetic candidates getting elected rather than the members whose chairs are shaped to their backsides they've been there so long. Maybe it would result in meaningful policy change that lifts our youth to a better future.

And it's not just about young adults. This view also goes to the future of families. About 20 per cent of the Hobart population is under 18. The needs of infants, toddlers, children, tweens and teens are unique, yet we so often neglect them in our planning across all government levels. Why? Because they don't have

a voice because their parents are too busy to even consider a run at public office.

That's why it's so important we make changes that support busy mums and dads to stand for council or parliament. People who are living the day-to-day juggle that is family life. People who understand the importance of childcare for meaningful lives for the whole family, people who see the need for a family-friendly city, people who innately know what these age groups need to thrive and what their parents need to survive.

So at the next election, consider whether you can run.

How can you make a difference to the future you and your mates will live? Do you think you have what it takes? And if you don't want to be the public figure, then go along to a few party meetings, work out which party aligns to your views and sign up.

Lastly, give the young candidates a go at the next election when you place your vote.

Ryan Posselt is a Hobart City Councillor and a paramedic, with two children under four.

Older people have plenty to contribute

Age shouldn't be a disqualifying factor when it comes to politics, writes Ingrid Harrison

In the realm of politics, diversity is crucial for a thriving democracy. The call for younger individuals to step into the political arena is not just admirable but a necessity to infuse fresh perspectives and innovative ideas.

However, when this call is accompanied by ageist rhetoric, as seen in the recent comments by Hobart City Councillor Ryan Posselt, it undermines the very essence of a united and inclusive society.

Mr Posselt's appeal for more young people to engage in politics is commendable. The energy, enthusiasm, and unique insights that younger generations bring to the table are essential for shaping a progressive future. However, it is disheartening to witness a community representative, supposedly championing inclusivity, resorting to divisive tactics by making remarks about older representatives who are either currently in positions or seeking positions in all tiers of government.

The attempt to pit one age group against another is not only counter-productive but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes. Age should never be a determining factor for a person's ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Older individuals, with their wealth of experience and wisdom, play an invaluable role in community development. To dismiss their contributions based on age is not only unfair but also shortsighted.

Lived experience is a treasure trove of knowledge that older people bring to the table. In politics, where decisions can have far-reaching consequences on every sector of the community, the importance of drawing from a diverse pool of experiences can't be overstated. The challenges faced by communities are multifaceted, and having representatives with a range of experiences, including those accumulated over a longer lifetime, ensures a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues.

Added to this, older people often possess a deep understanding of the historical context that has shaped their communities. This historical perspective is essential when developing policies that address the root causes of problems rather than merely treating the symptoms.

By tapping into the reservoir of knowledge held by older leaders, we can make more informed decisions that stand the test of time.

It is important to recognise that age does not define a person's ability

to adapt to new ideas or embrace change. Many older people are more than adept at navigating the rapidly evolving



Ingrid Harrison is president of Council on the Ageing Tasmania.

landscape of modern governance, using their experience to blend with what is demanded by day-to-day challenges. Age should not be a barrier but rather a bridge between generations, fostering an environment where different age groups collaborate for the collective good.

Rather than fostering division, community representatives like Mr Posselt should focus on creating platforms that encourage intergenerational dialogue and collaboration.

Building bridges between the young and the old is vital for the development of our communities. Each generation brings unique strengths, and a harmonious coexistence of these strengths ensures a more resilient and vibrant political landscape.

While it is essential to encourage younger people in our communities to actively participate in politics, it is equally important to reject ageist commentary that undermines the contributions of older citizens.

In the end, it is the community that decides. The older and more experienced representatives currently serving in our three tiers of government are there because the electorate has determined that they are best suited and able to deliver the outcomes the community desires at this time. The same applies to those who may seek to serve by standing for office in coming elections.

Age should never be a divisive factor; instead, it should be celebrated as a source of diverse perspectives and experiences. In our pursuit of a more inclusive democracy, let's simply appreciate the value that each generation brings to the table, recognising that it is the synergy of different ages that makes for great and inclusive communities.

Ingrid Harrison is president of COTA (Council on the Ageing) Tasmania and chair of the COTA Board.

Age no factor in keeping up with changing world

Youth offers no guarantee that a person will be in touch with the needs and desires of today's young people

In his column calling on young people to stand for political office in Tasmania's next parliamentary election, Hobart city councillor Ryan Posselt certainly pushed a few people's buttons.

Many (older) readers felt compelled to fire off letters to this forum, and president of Tasmania's Council on the Ageing, Ingrid Harrison, penned a measured response that supported Posselt's appeal for young people to step up, while at the same time calling out his ageist rhetoric.

Like Posselt, I think it would be great to see more younger people in parliament, and, like him, I think the voting age should be lowered to 16 to enable younger generations to have an earlier opportunity to contribute to decisions that will affect their future.

However, in his column (Mercury, January 10) the councillor betrayed a lazy habit of thought that is all too widespread in our culture: the simplistic equation of a person's age with characteristics that may or may not be related to the number of years they've lived on Earth.

Posselt suggested that older parliamentarians were, simply by virtue of their age, "out of touch with the needs, desires and dreams of young people". He also characterised young political candidates as 'energetic', while writing off older candidates as people whose chairs were moulded to their backsides (that, Ryan, was just plain rude).

What's complex about this issue is that a person's age can, sometimes, be related to their energy, or their

Danielle Wood



“ Our political representatives should be people who can keep up, but age is not the most significant factor in whether or not they will be able to do so

capacity to understand people of a significantly different life-stage to their own. But it isn't always. Not by a long shot.

Perhaps it's because age is so easily quantifiable, measurable in the cardinal numbers we mostly learned in primary school, that we tend to use it as convenient shorthand when we're actually talking about qualities that may be unrelated, or only related in the case of some people, to lifespan.

Let's take Eric Abetz, the former Liberal senator seeking reinvention



City of Hobart councillor Ryan Posselt.

as a Member of the House of Assembly for Franklin, as an example. Posselt suggests it's a shame younger candidates may miss out on Liberal Party preselection in favour of the "older statesman, who has already had his say for the past 30 years".

Is it a problem for a candidate to be 65? No, it's not. Is it a problem for a candidate to have decades' worth of experience in politics? No, it's not. Is it a problem when a candidate is out of touch with contemporary reality? Why, yes. And that's why Eric Abetz is a problem, and why I hope he is not elected to Tasmania's parliament.

It wasn't Abetz's age that caused him to decry the phrases 'love is love' and 'marriage equality' as 'glib' and 'meaningless', and to suggest that any change from the marriage + man + woman formula would 'destroy' the family.

We live now in a world where men marry men and women marry women, and families are understood to exist in many different formulations, and in which our



Opposition Leader Peter Dutton has been critical of Woolworths' decision not to stock Australia Day merchandise.

Former senator Eric Abetz, who recently announced his plan to return to politics.

The days in which people can unreflectively incinerate a heap of meat on the barbie, on a long weekend in January, while congratulating themselves on living in the greatest nation on the planet – is a version of Australia that's passed into the mists of time, according to Danielle Wood.

understanding of gender is deepening and changing. These developments should not be threatened by someone like Abetz, who lives in a state of denial about the world as it is now – not because he is on the far side of the average age of the population, but because he's enamoured of a lost world where rigid social norms concealed the truth of many people's experiences.

Posselt tells us that the average age of the Australian population, and of the Hobart City Council catchment, is 37. Curiously, that's the current age of TikTok phenomenon and arch misogynist Andrew Tate, who believes that women are the property of men and that their place is in the

home. Youth, then, offers no guarantee that a person will be in touch with the needs and desires of today's young people.

At 53, Peter Dutton's not particularly old, but even if he was 103, that alone wouldn't account for his being out of touch with contemporary reality.

It's hard to imagine a convincing rationale for the brain-fart moment in which he suggested Australians boycott Woolworths because the retailer chose, this year, not to stock Australia Day merchandise.

In a world groaning under the weight of garbage pollution, nobody needs miniature Australian flags mounted on toothpicks to stick in

their burgers.

Much more importantly, as the dwindling consensus for celebrating on January 26 shows, Australia has outgrown the current iteration of its national day.

I note the recent surge in claims that the significance of the date relates not to January 26, 1788, when Arthur Phillip drove a British flag into a patch of dirt belonging to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, but instead to January 26, 1949, when the Nationality and Citizenship Act was passed. But does anyone truly believe this flimsy bit of spin can counteract the grave insult to Australia's Indigenous people of holding a national celebration on a day that, for

many, symbolises dispossession and trauma?

Peter Dutton is old enough to remember a time when we did not begin events with a welcome to, or acknowledgment of, country; when Jetstar pilots did not announce arrival at a destination with a nod to the traditional owners of that land; and when our national broadcaster did not routinely include the names of local Indigenous peoples when identifying a place in on-screen text. But I am old enough to remember all of that, too.

Dutton's age is not the problem. The problem is that he'd like to return to a world that no longer exists, in which white people can unreflectively

incinerate a heap of lamb chops on a long weekend in late January while congratulating themselves on living in the greatest nation on the planet. That version of Australia has passed into the mists of time; the one that has replaced it is growing up by actively grappling with the unhealed wounds of its colonial past.

The world has changed and will continue to change. Our political representatives should be people who can keep up, but age is not the most significant factor in whether or not they will be able to do so.

Dr Danielle Wood is an acclaimed author, who has had great success writing under various pen names.

Hot Topic

Age appropriate

I find the debate regarding age limits – upper or lower – for elected members to be rather simplistic. In my experience, the ideal is to have a range of ages for representatives. You need youth for new ideas (usually) and energy, but you also need the wisdom of the elders, some of whom have new ideas and energy as well.

It is dangerous to stipulate age limits for political candidates.

I am no fan of Eric Abetz, but he should have every right to nominate for election – and 65 is hardly “old”. Having said that, he’d probably be at the bottom of my list – not because of his age, but for his extreme right views.

Bob Holderness-Roddam
Austins Ferry

are in Brissie!
Chris Davey
Lindisfarne

Age no barrier

With my 50th birthday fast approaching it seems I am heading for the scrap heap according to Councillor Ryan Posselt (“Equal age representation”, Mercury January 10). In 2022, I ran for Hobart City Council because I thought my 20 years of small business experience would be of some value to the Hobart community, a city that needs more progress ironically for the younger generations.

I ran as an independent because it is party politics that is on the nose, not the age of the candidates. Looks like I better not run again in 2026, by then I will be 52, practically ready for the nursing home.

Of course, younger people should put their hands up and have their voices heard, but years of experience

should never be discounted either.

It will be interesting to see how long Councillor Posselt stays in politics because I’m sure he would never want to be, as he describes, a “member whose chair is shaped to their backside”.

Edwin Johnstone
Hobart

‘Riff raff’ everywhere

I congratulate Phil Owen on his gracious response (Mercury, January 3) to Stewart Edwards’ disparaging diatribe on the citizens of Glenorchy and Gagebrook (Mercury, December 30).

The so-called “riff raff” you refer to Mr Edwards reside in all postcodes, possibly the most recalcitrant being within the suburbs you named in your rebuttal (“Homing in on riff raff”, Mercury, January 8).

Our society is already divisive enough without your sweeping

issues has the capability and experience to take on the apparently unrestrained vice-chancellor and his rampant team of property developers.

On the other hand, the Premier could make him the next UTAS chancellor, a move with the added benefit of avoiding future leadership clashes within the parliamentary Liberal Party.

Peter Colquhoun
Mt Nelson

Ageist nonsense

Considering Hobart councillor Ryan Posselt’s opinion piece on the superior value of young elected representatives aged under 37 years,

(Mercury, January 10) I am keenly reminded that between the age of 30 and 40 I was grateful to pay the monthly mortgage on time, with children in public school and small business to run. Hobart, unlike other parts of Australia, traditionally has not enjoyed large wages and bank accounts for its residents.

Perhaps it would be more appropriate to explain that if you have financial backing from your parents or a wealthy partner it’s possible. Life experience and education have significant value. Councils are large organisations whose functional needs should be treated with respect. You need to be

prepared to lean in, learn and ensure your decisions are based on good data so you can make responsible decisions for your whole community. Older people traditionally take on this mantle as they have both the time and money, along with the networks and local understanding. It’s ageist to suggest they are of lesser value simply imprinting their buttocks on a chair. It’s elitist to suggest that young people can jump up and run a candidature when they will struggle to pay their rent and source food for their own table, let alone dump their potential career opportunities for a chance at a seat that doesn’t pay minimum wages.

MERCUZOGMA - V1

Lazarus complex

Some of the more unfortunate characteristics of certain politicians are as follows:-

a) They develop the skin of a rhinoceros b) They possess an over-inflated ego c) They believe themselves to be indispensable, and d) They have a “Lazarus Complex” and keep coming back!

When will they learn that they are “past their use-by date” and quietly retire to a comfortable, well superannuated existence out of the spotlight?

Not pointing the finger at anyone in particular, Mr Eric Abetz.

Christine Needham,
Kingston

Stamp out ageism

I couldn’t agree more with Ingrid Harrison’s contribution (Op-ed, Monday 15 Jan) regarding ageism within our society.

Someone should never be discriminated against based on their age, and yet why is ageism still acceptable?

It is baffling that ageism is seemingly viewed by some as reasonable when it just is not relevant to someone’s ability to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Experience and a wealth of knowledge should be celebrated and harnessed within our society. If people wish to still contribute to their communities and or within the Tasmanian workforce, they should be free to do so without discrimination.

It does take a village to raise a child and the more older Tasmanians using their knowledge in positions of influence, influencing public policy and making life better for Tasmanians, the better.

Unfortunately, ageism over time does contribute negatively to a view of older people and it is inextricably linked to elder abuse, which affects

10 per cent of families.

Ageism in our society can be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social or neglectful.

We must make ageism and elder abuse everyone’s business – so we stamp it out.

Older Tasmanians deserve to be valued and live dignified lives with respect because they have contributed so much and still have so much to offer their communities.

Senator Helen Polley
Labor Senator for Tasmania

Just say no

Our young risk-taking, illicit drug-abusing, music festival devotees want their illicit drug use to be safe: no-risk risk-taking. Their parents are usually all for the testing of drugs at music festival events to minimise the harm their offspring can do to themselves because of the choices they make. There is another option available to young people for use as a risk