

Thorny election issues; But little scope for real change

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SAME-SEX unions, stem cell research and the bill of rights would likely be up for review if there was a change of government or a shift in the balance of power in the ACT Legislative Assembly, ANU Professor of political science, John Warhurst, says.

"I suspect many of the differences would be at the level of nuance," he said. However, opportunities for large-scale change were limited because much of government in the ACT was concerned with basic demands such as roads, rubbish and sewage. Professor Warhurst said the high cost of budget items such as education and health (and federal involvement) made it unlikely that there would be fundamental reform, whatever the result. He suggested that if Labor was ousted, controversial areas such as same- sex unions, stem cell research and the bill of rights would all be up for review.

He said it would not surprise him if there were also some changes of emphasis in education, but neither party would have much leeway in infrastructure and staff numbers. Increasingly, the health sector was also dominated by federal priorities, he said. "Given the ACT electorate, it would be hard for any government not to be environmentally conscious," he said. But the challenge was to combine environmental concerns with the need to encourage development. Territory government is not really big on ideology. The fundamental questions are likely to be in areas of planning, infrastructure development and public transport. One possibility if there was a change of government was a greater emphasis on public- private partnerships and user- pays systems to speed up the pace of infrastructure development, Professor Warhurst said.