

Lazarus with a triple bypass: the 'political parties for democracy' program is back, and in the news

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It turns out that the Howard-era Australian Political Parties for Democracy Program (APPDP) was at some point quietly exhumed, reanimated and hung like an albatross around the neck of the Department of Finance.

Devpolicy [wrote](#) about this program in late 2013, and [welcomed news](#) of its demise in February 2014. But it wasn't permanently cut after all, just rendered invisible. Now it's [back in the news](#), for what might be considered the wrong reasons.

In a recent [article](#) on [Inside Story](#), the ANU's Emeritus Professor Marian Sawer AO reported the results of some inquiries she made late last year about the reinstated program, to which there corresponds no line item in the Department of Finance's [2015-16 Portfolio Budget Statement](#). She was told, 'details about the expenditure and the current APPDP deeds are not available publicly'.

That's bad enough given that, as Professor Sawer underlines, the program is intended to promote 'representative, accountable, inclusive and transparent democratic parties'.

But matters might be even worse. In its prior life, the APPDP was supposed to allocate at least half of its funding to activities in favour of developing countries. That half was charged to the overseas aid budget, which is why the former AusAID was lumbered with the program's administration for a period after the Department of Finance was found, in an audit, to have mismanaged it.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs has made quite [emphatic](#), if vague, commitments about transparency in the allocation of aid resources. If any significant portion of the reinstated APPDP is being silently charged to the aid budget, the lack of transparency should be doubly troubling.

In principle, there is something to be said for supporting the main Australian political parties—the Coalition parties and Labor but also the Greens—to build the capacity of political parties in at least our neighbouring

developing countries. But, if this is to be done, it should be done through a dedicated, carefully designed, transparently implemented and independently evaluated program.