



Voices of Bean co-founder, Jessie Price. Picture by Elesia Kurtz

Pocock-inspired lower house tilt

Dana Daniel

A SOUTH Canberra community group that has been in touch with Climate 200 is searching for a candidate to launch a Pocock-inspired challenge in a Labor-held lower house seat at the next federal election, as the funding body prepares to plough \$1 million into independent campaigns across Australia.

Voices of Bean will officially launch its candidate search next month to find a local independent to run in the seat that takes in Tuggeranong, the Lanyon Valley, Woden, Weston Creek and the Molonglo Valley, founding member Jessie Price told *The Canberra Times*.

It comes after Climate 200, the funding body set up in

2019 by billionaire Simon Holmesà Court and which helped usher a group of so-called teal independents into parliament at the 2022 election, on Thursday announced it was fundraising \$1 million to "turbocharge" the campaigns of community independents.

Ms Price, a midwife who lives in Chapman, said a Voices of Bean candidate would be selected by the local community through a series of town hall meetings.

She said conversations at the local shops had revealed key concerns for people in the electorate as the rising cost of living, housing affordability, climate change and health and ageing, and that community members wanted a candidate who

showed "integrity, a connection to the electorate and genuine representation".

Voices of Bean has received mentoring support from ProACT, the group whose endorsement of Independent Senator David Pocock resulted in Climate 200 funding half of the former rugby union player's \$1.8 million campaign to blast Zed Seselja out of Federal Parliament.

ProACT co-founder Clare Doube said the group was "delighted" that Climate 200 would be supporting the campaigns of community independents at the next election, adding that such a candidate had a real chance of repeating the Pocock success in Bean.

"The numbers show it's

genuinely possible and the positive reactions to Voices of Bean are bringing new energy to the movement and creating real momentum," she said in a statement.

"The next election could well bring more independents to the ACT."

Bean MP David Smith, who holds the seat for the ALP on a seemingly safe margin of 12.9%, said he was not concerned by the Voices of Bean movement, or a potential Climate 200-backed campaign to take his seat, saying "people have got a right to run".

"Any democracy that functions well, you're gonna have a range of candidates," Mr Smith said.

"That includes independents, which have run before

in Bean ... I'm focused on engaging with my community."

Ms Doube said any successful campaign must be guided by the community, "empowering people to be active in their democracy and providing a practical way to channel their energy to help find the candidate who will stand up for the issues important to their electorate and not vested interests."

Climate 200 Executive Director Byron Fay said the organisation was aware of "several local groups" across Australia that may be eligible for its accelerator funding "to give early-stage community groups the best chance of success".

"Running an independent campaign is an uphill battle," he said.