

Whether or not it's some sort of record, the Liberals' loss of two Victorian candidates in a single day is way beyond what Oscar Wilde would have dubbed carelessness.

Already struggling in that state, the Victorian Liberals managed to select one candidate who, judged on his words, was an appalling Islamophobe and another who was an out-and-out homophobe.

The comments that have brought them down weren't made in the distant past – they date from last year.

Jeremy Hearn was disendorsed as the party's candidate for the Labor seat of Isaacs, after it came to light that he had written, among other things, that a Muslim was someone who subscribed to an ideology requiring "killing or enslavement of the citizens of Australia if they do not become Muslim". This was posted in February 2018.

Peter Killin withdrew over a comment (in reply to another commenter) he posted in December that included suggesting Liberal MP Tim Wilson should not have been preselected because he's gay.

Scott Morrison rather quaintly explained the unfortunate choice of Killin by saying "he was a very recent candidate who came in because we weren't able to continue with the other candidate because of section 44 issues".

Oops and oops again. First the Victorian Liberals pick someone who didn't qualify legally and then they replaced that candidate with one who didn't qualify under any reasonable test of community standards.

Read more: [*Politics with Michelle Grattan: Tim Colebatch on the battle in*](#)

Victoria - and the Senate

It's not just the Liberals with problems of candidates with unacceptable views, or bad behaviour.

Labor's Northern Territory number 2 Senate candidate Wayne Kurnoth, who shared anti-Semitic material on social media, recently [stood down](#). Bill Shorten embarrassed himself on Wednesday by saying he hadn't met the man, despite having been [filmed](#) with him.

Then there's the case of Luke Creasey, the Labor candidate running in Melbourne, which is held by Greens Adam Bandt, who shared rape jokes and pornographic material on social media. He has done a mea culpa, [saying](#) his actions happened "a number of years ago" and "in no way reflect the views I hold today". Creasey still has his endorsement. Labor Senate leader Penny Wong has defended him, including by distinguishing between a "mistake" and "prejudice".

It should be remembered that, given the timing, these latest candidates unloaded by their parties have not lost their spots or their party designations on the ballot paper.

As Antony Green [wrote](#) when a NSW Liberal candidate had to withdraw during the state election (after a previous association with an online forum which reportedly engaged in unsavoury jokes) "the election goes ahead as if nothing had happened".

It won't occur this time, but recall the Pauline Hanson experience. In 1996, the Liberals disendorsed Hanson for racist remarks but she remained on the ballot with the party moniker. She was duly elected – and no doubt quite a few voters had thought she was the official Liberal candidate.

What goes around comes around - sort of.

This week Hanson's number 2 Queensland Senate candidate, Steve Dickson, quit all his party positions after footage emerged of his groping and denigrating language at a Washington strip club. But Dickson is still on the Senate ticket.

While the latest major party candidates have been dumped for their views, this election has produced a large number of candidates who clearly appear to be legally unviable.

Their presence is despite the fact that, after the horrors of the constitution's section 44 during the last parliament, candidates now have to provide extensive details for the Australian Electoral Commission about their eligibility.

Although the AEC does not have any role of enforcing eligibility, the availability of this data makes it easier in many cases to spot candidates who have legal question marks.

Most of the legally-dubious candidates have come from minor parties, and these parties, especially One Nation, Palmer's United Australia Party and Fraser Anning's Conservative National Party are getting close media attention.

When the major parties discovered prospective candidates who would hit a section 44 hurdle – and there have been several - they quickly replaced them.

But the minor parties don't seem too worried about eligibility. While most of these people wouldn't have a hope in hell of being elected, on one legal view there is a danger of a High Court challenge if someone was elected on the preferences of an ineligible candidate.

The section 44 problems reinforce the need to properly fix the constitution, as I have argued before. It will be a miracle if it doesn't cause issues in the next parliament, because in more obscure cases a problem may not be easy to spot.

Read more: [View from The Hill: Section 44 remains a constitutional trip wire that should be addressed](#)

But what of those with beyond-the-pale views?

At one level the fate of the two Victorian Liberal candidates carries the obvious lesson for aspirants: be careful what you post on social media, and delete old posts.

That's the expedient point. These candidates were caught out by what they put, and left, online.

But there is a deeper issue. Surely vetting of candidates standing for major parties must properly require a very thorough examination of their views and character.

Admittedly sometimes decisions will not be easy – judgements have to be made, and a certain allowance made in the case of things said or done a long time before (not applicable with the two in question).

But whether it is the factional nature of the Victorian division to blame for allowing these candidates to get through, or the inattention of the party's powers-that-be (or likely a combination of both) it's obvious that something went badly wrong.

That they were in unwinnable seats (despite Isaacs being on a small margin) should be irrelevant. All those who carry the banner of the Liberal party should be espousing values in line with the party, which does after all claim to put "values" at the heart of its philosophy.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

View from The Hill: Victorian Liberal candidates find social media footprints lethal

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