



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
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(Queensland Chapter)***

#QPARLIAMENT 2020

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2019

Brisbane

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Mr FRASER: Welcome, everyone, to the November function of the ASPG. I would like to recognise our guests tonight: Melissa McMahon, Meaghan Scanlon and Sam O'Connor, who are going to speak to us about their perceptions of their first two years in parliament. I would also like to welcome the Speaker, Curtis Pitt, who over the last two years has been one of our strongest supporters. He has been very generous in his assistance when we have asked for it. He has been very generous in providing resources to our organisation, and we are continually thankful for that.

What we propose to do tonight is allow three of the newer members of parliament to provide us with their perspectives about how they have found their first two years in parliament and where they think parliament may or may not go into the future. I said jokingly that we might have them all back in 15 years time when they are old and cynical to tell us why it did not work out, but that will be for other people to worry about as time progresses.

As I said, the first speaker will be Melissa McMahon, the member for the new seat of Macalister, which I think is Beenleigh. Is that a decent description? I like descriptions. The second speaker will be Sam O'Connor, the member for Bonney, which is also a new seat. Everything is new on the Gold Coast. It is always changing. The third speaker will be Meaghan Scanlon, the member for Gaven, which is an old Gold Coast name from a hundred years ago. Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I will ask the Speaker to kick off our event.

Mr SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for being here. I want to acknowledge that we are gathered this afternoon on the land of Aboriginal people and I pay my respects to elders past and present. I also want to welcome all of you to Queensland Parliament House. I am very proud to be associated with the ASPG. I am a very keen supporter.

I was having a chat to Clem Campbell as he came in before. He said, 'Do you get a lot of members coming along to these events?' I said, 'I think the problem is that members believe they should not be studying parliament when they are actually in parliament.' At the end of the day, these are really important opportunities for us to hear insights. Particularly tonight I am really pleased to see that we have Melissa, Sam and Meaghan here—they are all in the class of 2017—who will give their perceptions or viewpoints on this term of government. I am sure they will be very careful to not talk about how grumpy the Speaker is and all of those sorts of things.

The great thing is that tonight you will hear from first-term MPs who have not had the enthusiasm beaten out of them yet. They are very keen. As is quite often the case, not only here in this place but particularly in your own electorate, you are quite often judged on your first term—very much so. Obviously everyone hopes they will get more than one term, and that is the challenge that all of us face at every election. The important thing is that people tend to get a really good sense of your work ethic. They understand who you are, what you are about and how connected you are to the community. That is something which can be completely foreign when it comes to sitting weeks, because people often do not have too much interest in what actually happens here in sitting weeks. You have that battle of making sure you are fulfilling your role as a legislator and being a local member of parliament, and I am sure you will hear those insights tonight.

One thing I was going to quickly remark on is that we have, of course, over the last couple of elections had significant changes in the Queensland parliament. We had a very lopsided election in 2012 and then a correctional election, if you can call it that, in 2015. Then we can look at the elections since then. When you consider the Westminster origins of our system of parliament, there are centuries of rules, standing orders and conventions. What I have noticed in the last couple of terms, because of the significant turnover, is that the corporate knowledge or the institutional knowledge is not there like it used to be. That is not always a bad thing, because with fresh ideas new things come into play, but sometimes there are things that have been lost which only those who have been here for a substantial period of time would remember.

The three members who are here, being new members, have a big challenge ahead of them, as every one of us does at election time, making sure that there is a good reason for the faith that was put in them. As I say, this place is full of stories, full of rules and full of conventions. The great thing is that these

three—and I can say ‘young MPs’, because I am old enough now—are making the rules. They are making the future because they are young MPs. We are very pleased that the members that we are starting to get elected to this place are of such calibre. I thank them for being here. I hope you enjoy their insights this evening. I have to go to another event, so I will not be able to stay for the entire night. I do hope that you get a chance to probe them not only about their prepared statements but also with some questions a bit later on.

Mr FRASER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I indicated earlier, I will ask Melissa to address us first for roughly 10 minutes, then Sam and then Meaghan. We will then have a period of questions for 10 to 15 minutes, depending on how things pan out. Without further ado, I invite Melissa to speak.

Mrs McMAHON: Thank you very much for inviting me to participate. I feel especially honoured because it was indicated that this was for young and inspiring members of parliament. I am feeling quite privileged that I still get included in the ‘young’ aspect of it, noting that there are cabinet ministers who are younger than me.

I am very pleased to be here tonight. I probably will go to some of the items that Curtis mentioned. I do not have too many things to speak about. I do not have a prepared speech. One of the things I am trying to do is learn to deliver my speeches not as prepared speeches but more from notes. That is something that I am personally learning as a first-term MP—that and I now need reading glasses. I have not quite got used to wearing them in public yet or still looking up and having a bit of a nauseous spell.

In terms of reflections on 2019, I did not think I would go too much into that because I think ultimately my success as a local member in 2019 is going to largely be judged next year. In fact, the work that I have done over 2018 and 2019 will ultimately be decided by the voters in my electorate in 2020. Whilst I might think that I have had some great wins, ultimately I am not the arbiter of that.

One thing I can reflect on in terms of some of the things that we have achieved as a government, and within these walls, is understanding that not every piece of legislation is that life-changing, society-changing, groundbreaking shift in attitude and ideology in this state. Don’t get me wrong: they do happen from time to time, but a lot of the bills that go through this House are largely passed through uncommented on and unnoticed—and largely quite ignored by the members of my electorate.

One of the things that I have determined and focused on—and Curtis touched on this—is the fact that there is the job we do here in Brisbane and there is the job we do in our local electorates. Whilst one can impact largely on the outcomes of the other, there are things that happen in this House that I cannot control that people in my electorate might not be that interested in, but where I feel that I have the most impact is as a local member in my electorate. I would like to think that come 2020 I will be judged on the achievements in my electorate.

Whilst I do like to talk about the achievements of what we do in the House, it is what I do in my local area that I like to hang my hat on as achievements as an MP. To that end, probably one of the things that I have learned in my first term is that it is not as easy to achieve what you want—to be able to say, ‘I would like to achieve this in my electorate,’ or ‘I think we need this,’ and then sit down with a minister to work out how you achieve that. It is not as easy as people in the electorate would like to believe. ‘We need this road upgraded,’ or ‘We need this in our school’—all of those types of things—are very compelling arguments. I would like to deliver them, but what I have found is that the amount of work that is required to sit down with various ministerial officers just to get even some of those smaller announcements is actually quite difficult.

I now know probably, going into this next election, that, when it comes to election commitments, being able to make the promises is one thing but being able to then deliver them or the work that is required to deliver them is something completely different. In terms of running in the last election, all the commitments that I wanted to make—and strangely I did not get many of them, but the two that I was able to make I have been able to deliver, so that is certainly an achievement for me locally. But I understand now that when I go with a request there is a lot of work that has to go on in the background to that. I have been spending a lot of time in this term preparing for what I can do locally even in the next term. The lead time is something that has been a bit of an eye-opener for me as an MP.

My background before becoming an MP is probably not the usual background that most people have. I had no background in politics whatsoever. I dabbled only briefly in student politics, and I did so as a mature age student, and it was very issues based for my campus at the time. I did one term, surprisingly, under the stewardship of the then young Duncan Pegg, who is now the member for Stretton. He had hair then.

Generally speaking, I had no interest in politics until I had kids. Into my late 30s I started to pay a little bit more attention to what was happening around me in terms of the politics and the world that we were living in. That was my whole reason for becoming interested in politics. It was not until one of my children

was born with a disability that I started to become a community activist, when I saw that we were losing services locally and I decided that I had to fight to get them. Putting myself forward as a community champion to achieve those outcomes really did require me to become interested and put my hat in the arena in terms of politics. That is the reason that brought me here. It was not because I did student politics or I was a youth member of parliament or any of those types of things. It was because my circumstances led me here.

My background is in the military and in policing. Those are generally not the areas that lead straight into a life of politics. The experience that I like to think I bring to this House, and particularly to the committees that I sit on, is that I get to put my former police hat on and talk through and work through bits of legislation. I know that ministerial advisers do not like it when I start asking questions: 'Yes, but how does this actually work? I have been a watch house keeper. I know what happens in these places. Tell me a little bit more. How is this going to work?' I like to think it is useful that I am able to bring some of that background to the work I do here in Brisbane, even if it is not something that I can generally stand up and talk about back in my electorate.

I actually consider running my electorate office to be very similar to my time as a police officer, strangely enough. I used to run a police beat in my local community, and it is not too dissimilar. Members of the public come in with an issue or a problem. Some of them I may be able to solve or address but the vast majority, as the local member, probably not. I need to involve other government departments and all of that kind of thing. I do not think my job out in the electorate is too dissimilar to what I used to do as a police officer, certainly in terms of community policing. I like to be able to bring that kind of experience to it.

In terms of what the future of the Queensland parliament looks like, I have made a real effort to be involved in events and activities like youth parliament, making sure I get to come in and be a Deputy Speaker for a little bit. It is quite interesting to sit back and see what it all looks like, when it pans out in front of you rather than being in the cheap seats at the back. That is quite interesting. What I have done locally is start my own youth advisory committee. A couple of years ago I wrote to every single person in my electorate under the age of 23 and asked them to be involved with my electorate office. From that, I have a core group of 20 young people in my electorate who I meet with regularly to discuss bills that are coming up.

Whilst I might like to think I am young and with it, clearly I am not. It is important for me, considering how many young people there are in my electorate—I think Meaghan might have some data on that—to know how these things affect them. I think it is important that all members of parliament, regardless of how old we are or where we are from, really do take the views and the interests of people who are far younger than us into account. Listening to someone explain the lockout laws and the task force on alcohol fuelled violence and what all of that has meant—yes, I did have to ask someone what the current procedure is for going into nightclubs at night because it has been a while since I did that, having three young children. It is important to me to maintain that link.

I do that with parents as well. I have a parents forum, but that is something that is much closer to my needs and I have those contacts quite easily. Having my youth advisory committee ensures that I am considering people of other ages when I consider bills or when there are issues that are important to them. I am very interested to know their thoughts, whether they are on local issues like pill testing or whether they are on broader issues like the voluntary assisted dying inquiry that is currently happening. Just because they are young does not mean they do not have an opinion.

I am very confident about the future of the Queensland parliament and our engagement of youth, as long as members of parliament and organisations like this and the youth parliament and the YMCA are actively trying to bring young people in, to be involved and to understand not only what is involved in the creation of laws but also what happens in this House and what local members of parliament can do.

That is my little spiel. I think I have done it just in time. I must apologise: I do have another event to go to, so I will not be able to participate in the Q&A. I think you will have some actual young members of parliament who will be here to answer your questions. Thank you very much for having me. Thank you, David, for inviting me to participate. As I said, I am more than happy to start a conversation with people about the future of this place.

Mr FRASER: Thank you very much, Melissa. The second speaker for the evening is Sam O'Connor.

Mr O'CONNOR: Thank you very much, David. It is a pleasure to be here, and now I can say with another young member of parliament, Meaghan. We are the only two members under 30, I believe. It is two years today since the last election, although we were both very marginal so we did not know the result of that election for at least a few days after. It was quite a few stressful days scrutineering in the polling booths. We are both here and we are the only two members under 30. I think it is good to talk about the future of

what is a confusing, complicated and bizarre institution. I certainly had no idea about how this place worked or about a lot of the things I know today, especially about sitting on a committee and being in the House. I genuinely had a minimal idea about how it worked. I have two of my old UQ lecturers here tonight, so I mean no offence in terms of the classes that you taught, but I have picked up how difficult it must be for an everyday Queenslanders to comprehend this institution. It is really important that we try to distil what happens here and communicate it to people so that they can feel involved and this place lives up to what it is meant to live up to, which at the end of the day is a platform for people's views and for those who represent them.

I am going to fully live up to the youth stereotype tonight and mostly talk about social media. That is because I have found that it is the most effective way of engaging with people. I think it is a real opportunity that we have, compared to even 10 years ago. The only way an MP could communicate with their electorate 10 years ago was by getting in the local paper or on the news or in a newsletter. Now you can update multiple times a day and get as much feedback as you like directly from a small metal and glass box that people have in their pockets all the time. It is a real opportunity for politics to engage people and make people feel part of the system.

It is one of the big challenges, though, that people feel disconnected from parliament, from politics, from government. This morning, while I was procrastinating in my office, I did the ABC's Australia Talks survey. Has anyone else done that? That is good—a few people. Fifty-five thousand people completed the survey. It was all about people's attitudes towards the future of the country. A couple of things were interesting in relation to this. Only 70 per cent—and 'only' is important—of people thought Australia was the best place in the world to live. I thought that figure would have been higher.

In response to the statement 'politicians will lie if they feel the truth will hurt them politically', 90 per cent of people surveyed somewhat or strongly agreed with that sentiment—90 per cent thought politicians would lie straight-up. That really brought it home for me. That is, like I said, where I think social media can come in. It lets you have daily insights into what is happening, into what you are doing as their local MP. It is a big challenge to not have complicated, wordy content. You have to try to distil these big, complex things into a few sentences. It is a real skill to do that. It opens the parliament up to people and that means that they are more likely to engage with it.

I think it is particularly important as a young member of parliament to try to better communicate this place to people. It is not about getting everyone to run for parliament, because clearly there are 93 of us and several million Queenslanders. Not everyone can do it, but we need to make them feel that they can engage with parliament and be involved in it and that they can communicate directly with me as their local MP.

I guess that is the main take-home I have. It is a challenging environment, particularly going into the future. As I said, we are at the stage where not that many people read the local paper or even the *Courier-Mail*, certainly not the *Australian*. I am on the news probably once a week—not as much as Meaghan. When was the last time you sat down and watched the news? Yes, you do it on Twitter. The five per cent of people on Twitter is barely anything, so you do have a decline in traditional media. It always fascinates me when you post a link to an article and people get annoyed when they hit the paywall. Someone has to pay for journalism. It is a real risk to democracy that you do not have people sifting through all the different things that come through these institutions. Things will get through and they will not have scrutiny applied. It is a real challenge going forward about how we have that. Although social media is good, it is an unfiltered way of getting stuff out to people and it can very easily be abused.

I have found locally that so many people will comment or message me saying that they have never had an involvement with politics or a politician before. A lot of people on some local issues we have raised say that the first they heard about it was through my Facebook page. Annoyingly, a lot of people think I am a councillor. I am sure other MPs have the same problem. I probably do talk about council issues a lot, but people do not distinguish between the levels of government so you sort of become a one-stop shop as a representative. That is not a bad thing; it is just about standing up in whichever way you have to. Most people do not swing towards a particular party. In fact, I find that we all have to—not you, Sandy; you are free of this—occasionally do things along blatantly political lines, particularly when the government, from my perspective, does outrageous things. People just tune out for the most part, and it just exacerbates the apathy they have and that dislike of politicians. I try to avoid that wherever possible, but sometimes I just cannot help myself. That really is the important thing.

Like I said, there are risks with the decline in traditional media, because we do lose a level of scrutiny, but also with social media. I noticed even last week I did a post about me getting Nando's for lunch—it was literally just me eating a burger at a local Nando's that had just opened—and it got 800 'likes'. Another post

I did on quite a serious policy issue got about 200. It happens like that constantly, but at least it is people engaging. At least it is people seeing me as their local MP/Nando's lover, and they are at least engaging with me when they might have not done so otherwise.

I do joke that I am essentially a tour guide. I seem to have two or three groups up every single sitting week and some on non-sitting weeks, but it is really important to show people this building. So many people are absolutely blown away by this as a building, particularly if you take them upstairs to the O'Donovan collection, which is the first publicly funded library in Queensland. It is really important to physically get people here to show them just what an incredible building this is and all the history behind it and the way that it is meant to function as an institution.

I also put together a little booklet of how parliament works. The joke is 'sometimes not well'. It is a 26-page explainer of how it all works. If you want a copy—the first run has all been given out—I am happy to post a copy to anyone. It was really important to try and link it back to the local level and link it back to the platform that this place could be. Particularly when you come in as an opposition MP, you really have to rely on the institution of parliament a lot more, particularly as a platform, a place where you can come in and make a speech and have some impact for your local area. That is really important.

People are a bit disillusioned with politics, but it is up to us as MPs to try to resolve that. I think we need to figure out a way to communicate a bit better to try to open up this institution so that people can see that it is here, it is doing what it is meant to do and they can be part of it and engage with it. Ultimately, democracy is not just turning up to the polling booth every few years; it is what you put in. The more people who engage, the better we will be as politicians and the better this institution will be. Thank you for having me.

Ms SCANLON: Similar to Melissa, I have not written my speech—not because I do not want to read it, but because I have not had time today to formulate a speech.

The first time I came into Queensland Parliament House was as an elected member of parliament. I had never entered this chamber prior to that, so it was a big learning curve for me. I had worked for a federal politician prior to that, but the Queensland system is quite different in that this chamber, the red chamber, does not operate. It was a really interesting experience for me to come into this House and learn the differences between the different levels of government and the differences between being a political staffer or a lawyer to being a member of parliament and being responsible to represent your entire community.

I have the great privilege of being the youngest member of this parliament. I am the youngest ever female elected to this parliament, and I want to acknowledge on the record that I certainly would not be in the position I am in today had it not been for some very remarkable women who came before me. I said in my first speech in this chamber that Irene Longman was the first woman ever elected to the Queensland parliament and, while we have differing political views on some things, I respect her courage to enter this place at a time when her presence was not accepted. She was not allowed to sit in the dining room to eat; she was relegated to the verandah. There were no female facilities—a situation that was not changed until many years after. I feel very lucky that I have entered this chamber at a time when we have so many women in parliament and that a 24-year-old can be elected to a seat on the Gold Coast.

I will not talk for too long because I prefer to answer questions. My experience over the last two years has been really interesting. My favourite parts of this job have been helping members of the community but also being able to create reform that has a meaningful impact on people's lives. I naively came into politics wanting to change the world and then realised that it is actually a lot harder. Creating reform and changing institutions takes time and it is difficult to change people's minds, but when you pass legislation or get investment in local communities that you want to see the investment in, it is really rewarding. One of the great things about this place and being a member of parliament is that you are privileged to make a meaningful impact on the lives around you.

As Melissa just said, some pieces of legislation may not seem that exciting, but some of them really have a huge impact on families around us. This year or last year we created a Human Rights Act in Queensland—that was a pretty remarkable thing because we did not have one prior to that—which really sets out some very clear rights for Queenslanders. There have been a number of pieces of legislation—and others that are not so remarkable—that have an impact on someone's life. That is the incredible responsibility that we all have as members of parliament. Even though it may not impact our community directly, each of the bills that we pass in this parliament does in some way or another have some sort of impact on the people around us.

Sam touched on the issue of young people in parliament. An interesting statistic I read recently is that in Queensland 39 per cent of the population is under the age of 30, yet in this parliament we have only two members under the age of 30. We talk a lot about having diversity in all political parties and all members

of parliament, but I do not think we always talk about age diversity. One of the things that is great about having young people and people of all age groups in parliament is that we all bring something very different. I agree with Sam in terms of social media, but also there are so many new IT changes happening. Having young members of parliament really gives a great insight into the policy direction and forward-thinking attitude that we as governments and oppositions need to have. When I consider social media, as Sam just mentioned, the way that we communicate between departments has even changed. Years ago departments would have just sent out a letter in the mail to constituents about a breast-screening check. Now we are doing stuff like that via Facebook and putting money behind it so it is targeted to the right people.

I think it is really important that we have people who understand those new platforms and are able to change really quickly. When I first went to school I remember I had an Apple computer, which was a very old-school Apple computer with a floppy disc, and by the time I had finished school I had an iPhone. Throughout my education there were rapid changes in technology, which I think put me in good stead to make sure that I was capable of quick, adaptive change, which I think is really important. In politics every day things are constantly changing and you need to adapt to whatever the relevant issue is. It is also about how we create legislation and keep in touch with what the wider community is doing. We see so many issues within the online space of the gig economy; there is scamming going on. People are using all of these online platforms in a way they never have before, and if legislators do not have an understanding of that then we are really not doing our job properly.

It is really important that we have people of all age groups and that, regardless of how old we are, we listen to everyone around us. Like Melissa, I try and make sure that I visit retirement villages because I am acutely aware that, while I do not speak on behalf of all young people, I probably have a pretty basic understanding of what young people are focused on but I might not really have a great understanding of what is important to people in retirement. All members of parliament should focus on trying to engage with their community, but I think we really need to make sure that parliaments are reflective of society. Whether that be based on age, sex or religion, having diversity is incredibly important.

Thank you very much again for inviting us along today. As I said, I would prefer to answer questions because I think you have probably all come to grill us and ask us questions. Thank you very much. I hope to speak to you all a little bit later.

QUESTIONER: My name is Barclay. My question is to Sam but also to you, Meaghan. You mentioned that on the Australia Talks survey 90 per cent of people either somewhat or strongly agreed that politicians will lie in place of the truth. Do you think that with the structure of party lines sometimes you will have to go against your own conscience and be careful of what you say? Do you think that lying is enshrined in the Westminster system?

Ms SCANLON: The thing is that when you enter parliament, either as an Independent member or as a member of a political party, you do so with basic principles and you agree with the values that your political party puts forward. I do not feel like I have ever done anything that is against my core beliefs. While others may not agree, at the end of the day you have to do what you believe in, and you probably would not be a member of your political party if you did not believe in those things. Sometimes it may be that if you are not strongly in agreement with something you are not going to be out there with posters saying this is what your position is, but I think for the most part we all try and be honest and accountable to the people who elect us.

Mr O'CONNOR: No, it is not enshrined in the Westminster system. I think part of the problem is the massive risk-averse nature. I can say that as a former media adviser to a federal MP as well. It is so risk-averse with the lines you get out, because if you stray from that then it can cause issues and the media are sort of looking for that to a degree. We sit in this place on sitting days from 9.30 in the morning until 7.30 at night. How much of parliament actually gets on the TV? It will be a tiny little snippet. The perception comes partly from seeing those robotic answers. I mean, does anyone watch Q&A? I cannot get through an episode of Q&A anymore because it is just all talking points that get trotted out. It is the same sort of thing. I think people have those perceptions because they just see politicians in that light. The small bit that they see is that bit which is the worst bit.

I think it is shifting a bit. If you are genuine you seem to get a bit more cut-through. I think that is a good thing. I do not think lying is enshrined. Like Meaghan said, you should be a part of a party that aligns with your values. It is a little bit maybe looser on our side. Particularly when you have a federal government with a one-seat majority, some members will use the fact that they are a member of the party of the individual to get their views out and use that for benefits for their electorate, but I think that is not a bad thing because we are not all robots. We are not all here just trotting out the same things as everyone else.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Oliver. I have just turned 16. This question is because I aim to get into politics. Do you think voters and other parliamentary members are sceptical of your experience due to your age? Do you think they treat you vastly differently compared to other people?

Mr O'CONNOR: Sometimes. I am getting a few grey hairs so that helps a bit. I have had a few say they were not sure of me last time, but they have sort of seen what I have been up to and they are more content with it, but sort of. It depends on the stage of life that you are at. I guess neither of us is married or has a family, so that maybe makes us appear younger than someone who is our age who has done all that. Sometimes, but it is able to be overcome. I think most people broadly give you the benefit of the doubt. In my 16th birthday from two years ago I looked very young. I look older this time so I think that will help. You can overcome it. It would be the same thing if someone is older. I think it is an advantage to look young and to look energetic. I think that really helps. I can devote literally all of my time to this, so that is good news for the electorate. Meaghan?

Ms SCANLON: Yes, I have had that experience. I remember during the election, not that many people but a couple of people would bring up the old life experience line, which I find interesting because everyone has different experiences regardless of what age they are and I am not sure at what age you are perceived as having enough life experience to be a member of parliament. Certainly there is a little bit of—I suppose some people are just concerned that you might not understand the challenges that some families face. The fact is that not every single one of us has experienced what it is like to be every single one of every Queenslander out there. That is why diversity is important, because you have all of those different views hopefully in the Queensland parliament. Even if you individually have not had that experience, someone else has. I actually had an experience in this parliament—and I will not name who it was because they are actually a lovely person, but it is a parliamentary staff member. We were in here before we went into the chamber—I cannot even remember what it was for; it was the ceremony—and they thought I was a staff member.

Mr O'CONNOR: I constantly get that.

Ms SCANLON: Members were asked to walk out to the chamber so I got up and walked out and they said, 'No, sorry. It's just for members.' I said, 'Yeah, that's okay,' and kept walking and they went, 'No, no, no. It's only for MPs,' and I went, 'Yep, I am one,' and kept walking. I think there is still a bit of a stereotype of what a politician looks like. I think that is changing around the world. You look at people like Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, one of the youngest female leaders I think we have ever had. I think the face of politics is changing and I think for the most part in a good direction, but it is going to take a little while, I think, for people to catch up with the fact that politicians do not always need to be middle-aged white men.

Mr O'CONNOR: It worked to my advantage a couple of weeks ago. I was at federal parliament and I bought a bottle of gin to give away to constituents—I have not put that Facebook post up yet but I will—and they assumed I was a staffer and I got a 10 per cent discount.

Mr FRASER: Just on the issue of age, of course Winston Churchill I think was about 27 when he got elected to parliament. He was nearly 90 when he left, so it works both ways.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I am Jordan. I am 18. My question is to both Meaghan and Sam. Obviously, it is quite an achievement going into politics so young and being successful. I was wondering what parts of your personalities, yourselves, or what you have done has allowed you to succeed as a young person in politics perhaps in comparison to some others. How does the experience of entering politics as a young person differ to that of an older person?

Ms SCANLON: I will answer the last part first. One of the advantages, I have to say—it is not an advantage—is that I look at other MPs who are a bit older than me who have families and it is incredibly difficult for them to time-manage. That is one thing, as a young person who does not have kids and does not have those obligations, that I find a little bit easier. It does not matter if I am at P&C meetings or events late at night because no-one is relying on me to be at home.

In terms of the personal qualities, I am not entirely sure. I suppose I have always been quite headstrong, which I think you need to be if you want to go into politics, but you also have to have, I think, qualities that you want to be around your community and you want to help people. I think, regardless of what political persuasion you come from, the majority of people who come into this place genuinely want to help people. We might have different ideas about how that looks, but at the end of the day we are here for the reason that we want to hopefully create a better society for the people we represent. If that was not our No. 1 goal every day, we would not have been elected.

Most people do not get elected by accident. It is a pretty difficult thing to get elected. I do not know about Sam, but for almost a year before the election I was doing phone calls every night and doorknocking every weekend, talking to community members. You have to have a dedication to your community. You

have to really want to do the job and understand that you are not there to be a celebrity, because actually you are going to be criticised probably more than you are going to be praised. You have to be doing it because you want to help your community, at the end of the day.

Mr O'CONNOR: Same advantages, I think—being able to give more time than other members would be able to. I talked about social media. A couple of years ago I was teaching a lot of my colleagues how to use social media, which is great. In terms of personal qualities, I guess hard work and knowing your area and showing that you are genuinely involved. Being genuine is the main thing, I think, that gets cut-through. I think people are looking for that, not just in politics but also in a lot of other aspects of life, in a lot of other ways of advertising. They want things that are genuine and that get more cut-through than anything, I think. I guess the main advantages are that you get more time, being a younger person. We are not at other stages of our lives to have other things holding us up.

If you want to run, be genuine and get involved in community groups. I am still the vice-president at my local community garden. I am still the vice-president of the local Meals on Wheels and on the committee of Rotary. Vice-president is the best job, because you do not do a great deal and you still sit on the committee. I highly recommend that.

Mr FRASER: I am not sure Mike Pence would agree with you!

Mr PICKETT-MCKELLAR: Both of you have disclosed that you were staffers before becoming MPs, and we often hear that framed negatively, I guess—about this idea of the professional politician—but is there anything positive you can say about having been a staffer before becoming an MP, even though it might have been at the federal level?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes, particularly if you have worked in an electorate office—not so much at an adviser level. Being in an electorate office on the ground, you get to know all of the community organisations, you get to talk to constituents and you know who to go to for the particular issues. For me, I became a staffer before I joined the party. I was very reluctant. I had encountered student politics at UQ and, no offence to any student politicians in the room—Barclay, sorry—it is the worst of politics and I avoided it like the plague. I was not involved in the parties before that. When I became a candidate I left the job there, so technically my immediate prior job is bartender/courtesy bus driver at the local footy club, but being a staffer was sort of what laid the foundation.

There is a really bad perception around it, but I do not think there should be because it is a really complex system that we are involved in and if you want people who know how it works and how it operates it matters what they do when they become an MP, not where they have come from. That provides a good basis, but if you pick up the best bits of the job, which is helping people and knowing where to go to and knowing how to navigate the bureaucracies, then that is the best thing that can happen and I think you would, in fact, want more people who had those sorts of backgrounds. It depends on the person and it depends on their motivations for running.

Ms SCANLON: I worked for a federal senator so it was slightly different.

Mr O'CONNOR: How many constituents do they have?

Ms SCANLON: They have lots of constituents—the whole of Queensland—which I have to say for me was helpful, particularly in my assistant minister role, in that I was able to network with people just outside even the bubble in which I was living. I think there is a negative perception of people being political staffers before they come into politics because I think people think that all you care about is politics. I also did not do the student politics thing, partly just because my university did not have student politics. I think I joined my political party right at the end of my degree and certainly was not really actively involved until I had left and have worked in jobs that were not political roles. I worked at outside school hours care, I worked at Network Video and Blockbuster when they were things, I worked in retail, I worked in hospitality and I worked as a lawyer very briefly before I realised I did not really want to be a lawyer. The reason I did not want to be a lawyer was that I wanted to create reform and I realised that you can do that as a lawyer to some degree but the real place to make changes and law is in politics. That is why I took a role as a political staffer, and I think I learned a lot of valuable lessons. One of the lessons was that it is not as easy as it looks—that it takes a lot of time to achieve things even locally in terms of getting commitments for things—and that legislative change, particularly when you are in government or when you are in opposition with a number of competing interests—and in federal politics you have a whole country with very different views. Even in Queensland we have very different needs from regional Queensland to South-East Queensland. Understanding that you are a part of a bigger team and that it is not just about you as an individual and your personal views on politics I think was really helpful for me prior to becoming an elected member.

Mr THOMPSON: You are both very young and you both come in with fresh ideas. Is there anything in parliament that you have experienced that you think should be changed?

Mr O'CONNOR: I think the big one for me, and the challenge will be—at some point I hope to be in government—budget estimates. That was quite a surprise to me. I think that whole system needs reform, particularly in a unicameral system. I think that whole system could change. Just a couple of weeks ago I was in Canberra for a meeting with a whole bunch of other similar committees from around the country. Other parliaments quite regularly allow opposition chairs of budget estimates committees. I think in one parliament I was talking to 90 per cent of the questions came from the opposition instead of the sort of fifty-fifty. I think that is real place for reform—but anything that opens it up. Like I was saying, it is quite an unusual institution for most people and it seems just too complex to get involved in. We already have a pretty good e-petition system here, but any way of engaging people with that room I think is good.

Ms SCANLON: I think it is involving the public more. I know that the Queensland parliament is doing a lot in that space to try to engage people more, whether that be on social media or just opening up the House more to the general public. I think the more people see what is debated in the chamber, the conduct of the chamber and the committee work that goes on behind the scenes—the more the public sees—the more that might change the conduct of individuals in the parliament.

It might also mean that people feel more engaged with the political process and understand what is happening on a day-to-day basis. I have to say that most of my friends have absolutely no idea what we do in this place and what committees are. They just have no idea. I think we should open it up more to schools—and I know a lot of schools come here—and make it available more online. Part of that is on us as members of parliament to communicate with the general public about what we are doing in this chamber, but we should make it a more accessible place for people. I know that we did that recently by doing a regional visit. I think things like that make it a better place for all of us long term.

Dr MOLLS: I have a question for both of you. It takes you back a little bit to the first question that was asked about whether lying is enshrined in the system. My question would be a little play on that. Is combativeness enshrined in the Westminster system—the party in opposition, the party in government? Coming from a country where proportional representation is the system that we use, you cannot help noticing how it creates a political culture of combativeness. That begs the question: does that set you up for self-selection? Are people who are attracted to politics particularly combative or is it something that you have to learn in order to survive? I was interested in how you have managed that for yourselves. Did you come in thinking, 'I'm going to be different. I'm not going to engage in mudslinging'? Did you find that really hard to maintain or was it something that you were fully aware of or very committed to—that you had to at times take on the opposition or the party in government?

Mr O'CONNOR: It is. In putting my tour guide hat on for the minute, the way I explain the mace is that we used to fight each other out on battlefields with this big stick and now we have our fights in that room. That is a good thing and a bad thing. I think when you see only a snippet of it that makes it look pretty bad. It is a place where people come because they are passionate about ideas, they are passionate about how this state should be run and they are passionate about making that a reality.

I think we are both very well behaved. I have not been kicked out or warned. Have you, Meaghan? You have been warned? Meaghan has been warned. I do not think I have been warned or kicked out. I certainly did not come to it with that. I am not that sort of person. I find that it is exactly like Facebook. Whenever I meet people in person who have trolled me online, they are never like that in real life. It is the same with the ministers who might have used some names about me. Whenever I am around them it is all fine.

I certainly was not seeking that sort of environment, but I think it is a good thing. It is a result of the passion that people have. You just should be harnessing it for good and not for negative reasons. It gets caught up a lot in the mudslinging and the rest of it. Combativeness is enshrined and it should be because that is ultimately what we are here for. We are here to fight for what we think should be the way this state is run.

Ms SCANLON: I should clarify that I did get warned for using an unparliamentary word that I was not even sure was unparliamentary. I am not going to repeat it. It is not a swearword. It is obviously combative and I think it is like that for a good reason. We are challenging ideas. We all come to these debates with different views on things. I think the appropriate format for us is to challenge them respectfully. When I say that, sometimes debates are not always conducted with respect. That is when it goes too far. It should never be personal. It should be about the policy.

I came to politics more interested in the negotiating side of politics rather than strictly, 'You're wrong, I'm right and we can't come to any sort of agreement.' For the most part that is what happens in this chamber, anyway. I think we agree on the majority of the bills. It is just the little snippets that are entertaining

where we are fighting each other that get aired on the news. I think that is where that negative perception comes from. Maybe we need to talk about some of the boring bills that get passed, where we have bipartisan support, so that people understand that we do not all hate each other like people might think we do.

Mr FRASER: Sorry, we have to wind up, unfortunately. We are a bit over time. People have other things to do. I would like to thank our three speakers: Sam, Meaghan and Melissa. I think if the calibre they have demonstrated tonight persists over time and they continue to get re-elected, the parliament of Queensland is in relatively safe hands into the future. We appreciate your attendance tonight. I think your insights have been valuable. They have been entertaining, which is vitally important in parliament, and I think we will all go away from here learning a lit bit more about how the place should operate and has operated in your eyes.

Would you all join me in thanking our speakers tonight? It has been very much appreciated. As is our wont, we have some gifts for our speakers. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attendance tonight. Refreshments are available across the other side of the courtyard. We will be there for an hour or so, roughly. You are welcome to stay and we look forward to your attendance at some of our events next year. We will again be having three regularly spaced functions, which we hope will be both entertaining and informative. Thank very much.