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AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP (Queensland Chapter)

WHO WANTS TO BE A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT?

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 9 September 2024

Brisbane

MONDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2024

Ms PRETTY: Good evening, everybody. Welcome to tonight's event. I firstly want to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. I would like to welcome you all to the Australasian Study of Parliament Group Queensland Chapter event, 'Who Wants to be a Member of Parliament?', which is also hosted in association with the Queensland Former Parliamentary Members' Association. My name is Lynda Pretty and I am standing in tonight as the secretary while the secretary is overseas. I also want to mention that Diana McCluskey, who is the Chair of the ASPG, is unfortunately unable to attend tonight. I would like to now hand over to Nonie Malone, a former chair of the ASPG and a member of the executive, who will be our moderator for this evening. Thank you so much.

Ms MALONE: A warm welcome from me to everybody, too. It is so lovely to see such a fine audience for this forum tonight. I see quite a lot of people who are returning who have been coming along and a few new faces, so everybody is very welcome. For those of you who are new, the Australasian Study of Parliament Group has a charter to bring together parliamentarians, academics, parliamentary staff, members of the media and other interested persons to foster research, debate and understanding of the political system—the democratic system—in which we are all operating. Forums like these add tremendously to the understanding that all of the different players have within the system.

Tonight's event, 'Who Wants to be a Member of Parliament?', as Lynda mentioned, is held in partnership with the Queensland Former Parliamentary Members' Association, and the Vice-President of the former members' association, Pat Comben, is here along with a few other members whom you will have an opportunity to mix with after the forum.

We are very fortunate tonight to have the wealth of experience that is available to us to address this topic. We have Ron Boswell, John Mickel and Professor Vicky Browning. I will just make sure that you are aware that the forum will be recorded by Hansard. Later when we have question time I will encourage you to please stand and say your name and then ask your questions. Again, we are so fortunate to have this Hansard record. For those of you who are interested, you can search our records for transcripts from previous forums, but the transcript will be available in a few weeks.

If you have a mobile phone, please remember to turn it off or set it to silent mode. If you require rest rooms, they are out the rear door, turn right, down the hall and then left, and they are about midway. Finally, should we have an emergency, please follow the directions issued over the loudspeaker.

The format for this evening is for each panellist to speak for 10 minutes and then after we will have a panel discussion that will include questions from the audience. If you do not mind, we would like you to save your questions for the end, thank you. Let's get underway and let's start with the Hon. John Mickel. John was the Labor member for Logan from 1998 to 2012 and Speaker of this parliament from 2009 until his retirement in 2012.

Mr MICKEL: Thanks, Nonie, and thanks, everyone, for being here. I am pleased to be sharing this platform tonight with Ron Boswell. Ron wrote this book. I did not buy the book; I was given the book but I had to pay 40 bucks for a cup of coffee to get it. I highly recommend it. I recommend it for this reason: probably from about 1993 onwards there has not been much in the way of literature on Queensland politics. It has been added to, but there is nothing much new. In the thesis that I am writing I discovered to my horror that there is a wealth of stuff on the Labor Party and I was asked when I was doing the review, 'Why isn't there anything much on the conservative side?' This book is an attempt—and a good attempt—from an insider and it gives that perspective. I could say as a Labor person that the reason there is so much on the Labor Party is that we create the villains and we create the heroes, but be that as it may.

One of the things that captured me and why I wanted to do this tonight with Ron is: he has a concern, as I have, about whether we are attracting the best people into state and federal politics. I am not going to comment on current personalities or former personalities. I simply thank everybody for the timing of this because they are about to open candidacies for the various elections and, if you are thinking about it, what

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are some of the things that you might like to think about before you undertake a political career? Demonstrably I think what is happening is that the major parties are putting up too many barriers of entry. I will speak for the Labor Party; Ron will speak for his own side.

There is no doubt at all that, when you look at it down through the decades, for the major parties party membership is declining. When you look at, for example, the Labor Party's barriers of entry—and I have observed two preselections recently—the barriers of entry are huge. In terms of federal seats, the Labor Party holds five out of 30. I would have thought that in that sort of climate you would be hunting around to see who is around to stand for such a seat. The member has been there for 20 years. It struck me that there was no preselection at all and the candidate was just endorsed. It may well be that they opened nominations; I just find it striking that when you are holding five you would be looking to see what is around.

The first barrier is gender. I am not saying there should not be any women, but what was clearly evident in the Moreton case was that 'if you are other than a woman do not apply', and I see that increasingly in some of the contests around. At a time of five out of 30 and three senators out of 10, I would have thought that the hunt should be on for, 'Who can we get?' Who is going to make a five become 15 and three become six rather than three and 'let's keep it at three'? The second thing is that in dwindling membership the factionalisation, which has been in the Labor Party forever but in smaller numbers, is a significant barrier of entry because you have to negotiate that.

There are two things there—factions and gender—but there is a third factor, and that is costs. I noticed what I thought was a facile article in the *Australian* the other day about all of the fundraisers, as if somehow this is tawdry. In a state electorate these days, if you want to get one piece of paper out to now 39,000 electors—so 15,000 houses—work it out. What does one piece of paper in one envelope to 15,000 households cost? When I last looked at my account when I went into 1998, I could probably afford one piece of literature. Given the size that the Logan seat is now, you could not walk it around. You do have to fundraise, so the notion from the journalist that somehow fundraising is tawdry and you are in the pocket of somebody is just asinine. No wonder the circulation of the media is dwindling, as is the quality of journalists who put that together.

The third thing is—and I do not want to get on to a pet hobbyhorse because I know, Nonie, you are a consultant and I do a bit of that—I find I am a second-class citizen because somebody approaches me to help them. It is called double-hatting if I contribute to a campaign, and there is a whole host of barriers now that have been put up in the name of proper governance. I will tell you a secret: one of the schools out in Western Queensland asked me for a hand with getting a schoolteacher. Now, you cannot get much more corrupt than that because I agreed I would help!

The other thing is that, whilst we have a gender quota we do not have a quota—and I do not want one—for the types of people we are getting. For the Labor Party now I would be interested to see how many tradesmen they get, for the National Party how many farmers they get and the Liberal Party how many small business people they get. I am not critical of that because what has happened is that increasingly the career path is ministerial office and into parliament, and there is a reason for that. The moment you put up your hand and say that you want to run for something, the small business will say, 'Listen, we're not political.' It happened to a former staffer of mine. You then have to find a job. The Labor Party has been lucky that it has been in government, so the ministerial pathway is open to it. Should that change, then in Queensland there is no pathway, so the pathway then is either the unions or the Public Service.

With regard to the way they have changed the parliamentary entitlements down through the years, I saw an article yesterday from those really funny people on *The Project* saying, 'The politicians can all get on boards and they get a big superannuation, so why wouldn't you go into it?' Ladies and gentlemen, tonight is the 20th anniversary of the abolition of superannuation for parliamentarians and the 'so what?' with that is this: if you are a doctor, a nurse, a lawyer, a teacher—rattle it all off—if you do four years or, worse, you do eight years, all you have done is interrupt your career because there is no safety net for you. There were very few people who got the superannuation anyway, but they took it away. I regard that as a barrier of entry, because why would you give up your small business? Why would you give it up if in eight years time you are suddenly going to have to build that business up again? I have seen dentists and specialists in this place who, in order to keep their registration up, have to devote one day a week to keeping that registration up. Is the public served by having six-day-a-week politicians while they have to keep it up? I do not think so, so I regard that very much as a barrier.

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So are we attracting the best? I think we are attracting a slice. I think when you look at it federally, given the rise of Independents you could argue that every one of them is a well-educated and professional person, so in that sense they probably have more at stake and make the parliament work, but here is the rub: if you look at the 18- to 34-year-olds—and a study has just been done on them—50 per cent of them have no value connection to any political party. That is not a criticism of young people—not at all. What it is is a statement that a bloke like me would never have got 14 years. Why? Because the young ones with no commitment are coming through and no longer—and maybe there never was, but there sure is not any longer—is there such a thing as a safe seat. So if you are giving up a career, think about what that career might look like in four years or, worse still, eight years, because the wheel turns and eight years is about it.

So on that happy note, I do want people to stand, but I do not want people to go in there and think, 'Boy oh boy, I've got a career for life.' We had a seminar last time where the topic was constituent MPs. I am looking around now at all the former constituent MPs, and the sad news is that you come and go with the government of the day and it does not matter how hard you work, but that does not mean that there is not something ennobling about it. I just do not want you to think that you have a career for life. I do want you to take it on. There are a lot of skills you will learn, but sometimes it may be better if you do it later in life. That is my message. Oh, and by the way, the book is on sale and it is at the discount price tonight; it is only 40 bucks tonight!

Ms MALONE: Thank you, John, for the depth of thought that you have put into the topic. It is certainly very helpful to understand that perspective from somebody who is on the inside and looking to see, 'What is happening around me? What is happening here? Why are things changing, and are they changing for the better?'

It is now my pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Ron Boswell. He was a Queensland senator from 1983 to 2014. Inside that very long period of service, he was the leader of the Senate from 1990 to 2007. For those of you who are not in the know this will sound a little strange, but he was the Father of the Senate from 2008 until his retirement in 2014. For those for whom that is an alien concept, it just means he was honoured as the longest serving senator for that period. In 2020 he was awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the parliament of Australia and the people of Queensland. You have already heard about his wonderful book. I would like to welcome to the podium Ron Boswell.

Mr BOSWELL: Thank you. Nonie, John, former and current members, ladies and gentlemen, let me present the ASPG with one of the problems facing all parliaments in Australia: a lack of candidates to put their name forward to run for the state or federal parliament—if you believe, as I do, that if you have a good parliament you will have a good country. When I entered parliament in 1983, the Hawke government had just taken office. The standard of the Labor front bench was good—spectacular, actually. The front bench was made up of Hawke and Keating, both brilliant parliamentarians; Peter Walsh, the finance minister, who happened to own the farm next door to my grandparents in Doodlakine in Western Australia; John Button, the leader of the Labor Party in the Senate; and of course, Michael Tate, who became a priest in Tasmania. These men led the government. They did big things. They did not govern by polling or focus groups. They did what they believed was in the best interests of Australia. For an Australian Labor Party government to remove the tariff wall around Australia's manufacturing, which was heavily unionised and Labor orientated, was very courageous.

John Howard went to the Australian people to ask for a mandate to introduce a consumption tax. He believed that a consumption tax would benefit Australia. He had the courage of his convictions. He put a new tax to the people of Australia at an election, and he won. Howard's decision to remove the guns from Australia and take on his most conservative supporters—the farmers and the graziers—was astounding. The decision was made after the mass shooting at Port Arthur. Howard made this tough decision based on what is right, rather than a popular vote. I know. I was a National Party senator and I felt the heat firsthand from rural Australia. Every time there is a public shooting in America, I thank God Howard had the courage to stop the gun lunacy. Howard's decision to restrict the guns will be praised as a great legacy long after Howard has gone.

People like that, who made those decisions, are not going into parliament; they are not applying for the job. John Mickel and I come from different sides of politics. Through a long association with politics we have come to the same conclusion: there is an incorrect assumption that people are lining up to put their name forward for preselection. That is not the case. Even in safe seats like Dawson, which has been National Party forever, it was very hard to get candidates. After 32 years in parliament, when I attended my last meeting in the joint party room I stood up and said, 'I am the only person in this room who has run their

own business.' I ran my own manufacturers agency for 16 years before I entered parliament. I cannot think of a better way to understand parliament than to run your own small business. You had to meet your overheads—meet your wages and the rent—before you made anything yourself. You had to know how much you had to sell before you would break even. You had to get on well with your employees and you had to keep customers happy. Running a small business was a great way of being introduced into parliament.

Whether you get into parliament through small business, having a law degree or academia, you need some world experience to make you understand how parliament affects the private sector. Going straight into parliament from a political office as a staffer with no experience in commerce does not make for the best members of parliament. Unfortunately, that is how people are being recruited into parliament by the two major parties. The Labor Party, for example, signs up students during orientation week at university. If they want a parliamentary career, they are directed to finish their degree before being warehoused in the office of a state or federal MP or a union. From there they are promoted to a faction and then, if they are active, they get channelled into a ministerial office. They learn and earn their political stripes and they end up jockeying for preselection in a seat near you. They have no real-world experience; they have never run a business or been self-employed.

The Liberal Party is the same way. The potential candidate becomes a staffer straight from university and works their way up to advising a frontbencher in a political office or in a government agency. They advise on policy that they have, in effect, never seen in the real world, without ever experiencing it themselves. We are losing the diversity of candidates. People are entering parliament without being in business or in the private sector. This is evident with the Prime Minister and the previous prime minister—both from political backgrounds but both coming through the party system having never experienced the outside of the parliamentary bubble.

The number of candidates coming forward and putting their name up for parliamentary preselection is going down like a brick. In 1974, when John Howard ran for Bennelong originally, he was opposed by 24 Liberal candidates. In the same year, 29 candidates put their hand up for preselection in Bradfield. In 1974, Wentworth had 15 Liberal candidates standing for preselection. Fast-forward to when Philip Ruddock recently did not contest his safe seat of Berowra. Only three candidates applied. When Joe Hockey did not contest North Sydney, only three people nominated for the seat. In John Howard's recent book *A Sense of Balance* he points out that in the 2016 election 50 per cent of the candidates who ran for the Liberal Party were either staffers or lobbyists. I also researched Labor and found that 55 per cent were staffers and 40 per cent were trade unionists.

More women should be elected to parliament to reflect society. We also need more diversity of careers in the battleground of parliament. Members of parliament with different experiences can look at and examine pieces of legislation with outside knowledge and work out what they will do to the electorate. Nigel Scullion was a National Party senator for the Northern Territory. He had been a fisherman, owned his own salvage company, shot feral dogs from helicopters and many other things. He brought a great amount of diversity into parliament. Because he had worked in the Territory with Aboriginals, he became the minister for Aboriginal affairs. He brought in practical legislation that made a difference to Aboriginal communities. One per cent of all government purchases had to be from Aboriginal businesses or entities.

I can think of no other issue that is so important to our parliamentary democracy than getting the right people into parliament. Parliament is the biggest business in Australia. It is owned by every Australian. If it runs well and makes correct decisions, we have a prosperous egalitarian country, and we all share the benefits. We should be looking for the best and the brightest to go into parliament. We look for the best to run BHP or Rio. I spent 32 years in federal parliament. Over that time I saw both sides of parliament shift their parties to selecting their candidates from staffers with a patronage of factions. After my 32 years experience I wrote a book, *Ron Boswell: Not pretty, but pretty effective*, that addresses some of the problems for people who want to get into a political career. It is a true tale of how you can actively influence the direction of the government, change the policy of your party, influence the joint party room and change the course of your country.

There were many different issues we took up in parliament on behalf of our constituents through Senate inquiries, questions and speeches. One practical issue was stopping the importation of bananas from the Philippines which, had it happened, would have wiped out the industry in Queensland. There were many wins. Each win generated a group of happy people you had delivered for. For them, the political

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system had worked. Whether it was the fishing industry, the banana industry, pharmacy or small business with trading hours—these were the people I represented. The experience I gained in the business world helped me unbelievably to represent people in parliament.

When writing this book I asked the question: why has this deterioration happened in our parliamentary candidates? I have come up with three reasons people will not put their name forward. They are: the factions in political parties; the scrutiny of integrity commissions that can investigate everyone's private life; and the failure of the superannuation system to provide adequate compensation and to meet the needs of the people. No-one goes into parliament to make money. If making money and amassing wealth is what you want, then parliament is not for you. On the other hand, you owe it to your family to provide a decent retirement.

Politics is hard and it is brutal. Every three years you put your job on the line. It does not matter how hard you work or how many constituents you see, you will go in with the tide and you will go out with the tide. The average life of a House of Representatives parliamentarian is between seven and eight years. You have to win two elections and stand for the third before you receive superannuation. That is nine years out of your business life. In my book I propose a review of the superannuation scheme to see that it meets today's needs. Under the present scheme you cannot access your super until you are 65.

The ideal time to start your parliamentary career is in your early 40s, when you will have a mortgage and the kids are at school. If members of parliament get thrown out at the next election, what happens to the mortgage and the school fees, let alone independent retirement? People are just not prepared to go there. The job you had in the private sector is gone. You have become politically tainted and no-one then offers to employ you. You have to start again. Politics as it stands now is not an option that offers any benefit or certainty to family security.

I want to mention a person whom John Mickel and I both know. Last week I had a cup of coffee with a young person I encouraged to enter politics. John knows this guy. We both agree he is an excellent type of person to enter parliament. He is in his 40s. He had been a staffer but had gone into the private sector to gain some experience before seeking a seat. He is married, has three children and is successful in his new job. After looking at his political options, he told me that he had come to the conclusion that the risk of running for parliament was too great. The financial risk was too high to put his family through it.

In conclusion, I want to quote the last chapter of my book because I think it covers it all—

Australia is a great country with so much potential but failing, not because we don't have access to resources. We are awash with every mineral in the world, and we feed and clothe millions officially through our primary industries. Yet far too many people live in cars. Seventy per cent of our old people's homes are running at a loss. Medicare is broken. You cannot get a doctor in country towns.

If we start to recruit people with skills who can actually go out and represent people in the parliamentary system, we can turn this country around and realise its full potential. Thank you very much.

Ms MALONE: Thank you very much, Ron. Thank you for that rallying cry. It is going to be very interesting to hear the discussions that ensue afterwards. It is now my pleasure to introduce to you Professor Vicky Browning, who leads the Pathways to Politics for Women program at QUT. Vicky is an organisational psychologist and executive coach specialising in leadership and human resource development. The QUT program is a national nonpartisan initiative to increase female participation at all levels of government equipping women to succeed in being elected and to thrive as political leaders. I welcome Vicky to the podium.

Prof. BROWNING: Thank you, Nonie, for your kind introduction. I too wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians—the Turrbal and Yagara peoples—on whose land we meet and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you also to the ASPG for the kind invitation to join this panel this evening.

I thought maybe I would start by introducing you to five women. Their names have been changed but the stories are factual. There is Jenny. She is in her early 40s—has children, is divorced, is a social worker, has lived experience as a domestic violence survivor and who lived in shelters and in her car to escape her partner, has tattoos on her arms. There is Jane, who is in her mid-30s—is an experienced and qualified lawyer, has long-term experience in her party. There is Louise, a young 24-year-old First Nations woman who lives and works in a regional area in Queensland. There is Renae, a refugee from Afghanistan who runs an organisation which helps Afghanistan women escape to Australia. There is Jayne, who previously was a policewoman, who has lived and been active in her community for all her life.

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All these women have completed the QUT Pathways to Politics for Women. One has been preselected for the federal election, one has been preselected for the state election and two were elected, as a councillor and a mayor in their respective wards. In the recent local government elections we had 26 alumni from our program—13 were elected. Six of these are regional, five of them are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and one is a First Nations woman. In the recent by-election we also had two alumni stand. For the upcoming elections, for the state election we have 15 preselected and for the federal election we have two at this stage preselected.

Currently, QUT Pathways to Politics for Women has graduated 107 women from the program since we started in 2020—33 of them are regional, 25 come from different culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and nine are First Nations women. Despite the barriers, which I will speak to and which my fellow panellists have spoken to, these women are still keen to put themselves forward to build their capability and to run for election. Do these women deserve to be in politics? Absolutely. Are they who we deserve? Absolutely. Why? Because they represent and understand their communities—their needs, concerns and aspirations—and have a very deep need to make a difference for these communities. They have also been on a program which has built their foundation skills and knowledge in politics. In an article I read recently on representation of community voice, this quote particularly struck me—

There is currently a disconnect between society and those representing us. Democracy is about providing voice to everyone including across all diverse groups in our societies. A healthy democratic system is not about homogeneity; it is about embracing and supporting diverse perspectives.

Over 50 per cent of the people who live in Brisbane and in Queensland are females. We have a 30.4 per cent representation of females in our state parliament. In Queensland at the local level, women councillors make up 44 per cent of the 77 councils in Queensland. To quote Julia Gillard, 'If you believe, as I do, that merit is equally distributed between the sexes, then any result that isn't around half and half should be troubling.'

In 2021, over seven million people in Australia were born overseas. That is 27.6 per cent of our total population. In Queensland, 22.7 per cent of our population is made up of people who were not born in Australia. Interestingly enough, one of the areas that has the highest representation of people who are from outside Australia is Sunnybank, just up the road from us—26.6 per cent.

Why are we talking about women in parliament and why are we talking about diverse women in parliament? The interesting thing from a lot of the research that is coming out now—and has been, quite frankly, around for a while—is that women have a very distinct way of leading that embraces ideals of responsibility, caring and interconnectedness. They tend to focus on relationships of importance in the community. They tend to focus on consensus and collaboration. They have a high level of interpersonal sensitivity and an orientation towards the collective interests and cooperative relationships. In research that we have been doing on women in leadership roles in politics, we are also finding that, you can get some fierce women, you can get assertive women and you can also get collaborative women. Collaborative women say, 'I'm here to wrap my arms around my community.'

In countries which have been run by women, recent research has shown that they were better at controlling the impact of COVID due to a high level of trust and credibility that was vested in them. Increased female political representation leads to positive outcomes like budgetary and financial stability, and acceptance of more rigorous climate change policies. Quite frankly, women in parliament allow us to attend to areas that are important for women. This quote might be a bit confrontational for you, but this is what it is—

For far too long, young women have sat on the sidelines and watched as men made decisions that directly impacted their futures without understanding the complete impact it may have. A great example of this is how extremely underfunded under researched the Endometriosis disease is. Governments are now scrambling to fund research centres and laboratories for a disease long ignored and misdiagnosed for many women.

That is a quote from our research with emerging women leaders.

Just like we talked about, there are barriers to women who want to be in politics. In the research we have been conducting with women who are putting their hands up for politics, the first one which we have reflected on is limited financial resources. It costs a lot of money to go into politics. If you come from a marginal community or a regional community or you are a refugee, you just do not have that money. They also say: 'The negative impact on my family'; 'The invasive nature of political campaigns and the public

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exposure that comes with running'; 'The negative image of politics as a career, particularly for women'—and we have talked about that as well; and 'The impact on my personal reputation and my career,' and we have highlighted that.

The fourth barrier that comes out is balancing across various roles. I thought this was quite an interesting quote: 'It's like having three full-time jobs—mum, business owner and aspiring politician.' There is also limited support from political party or political mentors; limited political knowledge and necessary skills—and this is where the pathways program comes in. Gender stereotypes and bias have not gone yet, and there is a low self-belief and confidence that women have in themselves.

Some of the things that help women get into politics are: support from a political community, from mentors—the Pathways to Politics for Women provides them with mentors to help them once they have left our program, and a lot of the women that are campaigning at the moment are working with mentors; opportunity for capacity building, so having a program like the pathways program allows women to acquire the relevant knowledge; support from families and friends, those volunteers that are going out there are their support; relevant knowledge and skills; and a clear motivation to run—they really want to make a difference.

What are we left with? If we want these women and these women from diverse communities in our parliament, we need to build their capability to stand and be in office. We also need to keep them there because, for women, often once they get into parliament it is as tough as it was to get into parliament. In the pathways program we provide supportive networks. We provide them with an understanding of what it is like to be a female politician. We provide them with mentoring and coaching and build their knowledge and skills, so hopefully the representation in parliament will reflect the communities from which they come. Thanks.

Ms MALONE: Thank you very much, Vicky. There is so much for us to ponder on there, and I am sure a lot of the things that Vicky, Ron and John have said will come up and be fleshed out a lot more in the question time period. I remind everybody that Hansard is recording the whole forum, including your questions, so we request that when you ask a question please ask a question rather than make a statement, and keep your questions short and to the point so that many people have the opportunity to ask questions in this limited amount of time. Do we have a question ready to go? I remind everybody to please state your name and association if that is relevant.

Ms BERRIDGE: Good evening. My name is Adelia Berridge. I am a former councillor at Redland City Council. I will try to make this very quick. My question is to Vicky Browning. I want to raise three points before I ask my question because it is very relevant. Political campaigning is hard. It is disgusting. It is filthy. It involves sociopathic behaviour. There is illegal activity. It brings your family down. Your house is targeted. You go through all of that. You leave it until later in life so your kids are not affected and then you run. The luckiest thing for me was COVID. I got in because of COVID as there was no pre-poll. People had to just go in, vote and go home—the best thing they ever did.

Then I got in. I had a huge background in business. Once I was in, I was the only councillor to bring in three major projects in my first term. I was also the only councillor to bring in any projects; I had another 10. I had 50 OIA complaints made against me, most of those in the previous 18 months. OIA complaints mean you are guilty until you prove yourself innocent. I spent many hours fighting OIA complaints and spent \$60,000 on legal costs. You would think that should do it. I was out there campaigning all the time for my four years; I never stopped. When it came to the election, Hillsong were up against me. I had Hillsong campaigning that I was the worst councillor ever. I was not the only one. I was 'part of the Greens party', yet I have never had any association with the Greens in my life. The mayoral candidate then had to be taken to court and he had to be shut up 24 hours before the election—

Ms MALONE: Adelia, do you have a question?

Ms BERRIDGE: I am coming to it right now. You said that you understand—and I wrote it down—the negative impacts through the elections. The ECQ do nothing—nothing—and neither does Meaghan Scanlon. So how does anyone like me step up into state or federal politics after the toxic and vicious behaviour that I have been through? I am a class witness.

Prof. BROWNING: That is the exact point I am making. A lot of the time women would have difficulty getting into politics. Then when they are in they face a difficult situation, and it varies. The research that has been conducted shows it varies depending on where they are at. We are looking at a concept called

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psychological safety. Psychological safety is the ability to have a voice to be able to engage in robust debate and have different perspectives. We know there is a lot of work around about toxic work environments. Even in chambers, we need to be able to debate robustly and have different perspectives. That is my exact point. It is very problematic, yes. I do not have the answer for it at this stage.

Mr DEE: My name is Cliff Dee, private observer. I would like to have 10 minutes to put my contribution. From each one of you, what is the single biggest issue to address the topic? The topic is: how do you get better qualified people into parliament? We have spoken about many things, but let us have one from each person. What is, to your mind, the most significant?

Prof. BROWNING: From my research, the most significant is financial constraints. It is the top of the pops. It is very difficult for women to even get their head in. We need to think about that. With that are all the facts that Ron talked about—they have to give up their job, they have children to support, and there are a whole lot of things that come with that. That is one of the key things for them.

Mr MICKEL: Mine would be that it is always finance. The Labor Party just simply open it up to a wider range of people.

Mr BOSWELL: I think the barrier in politics is mainly the lack of a financial safety net. You can go in and spend 15 years of your life in politics and walk out with \$300,000 to last you the rest of your life. It is very hard to live on it. You cannot live on it. The pension or the superannuation—the safety net—has gone. It makes it very difficult for people to actually go into parliament. You have to be pretty wealthy before you go in. The financial aspect is there. It costs you a lot of money to get into politics. It costs you a huge amount of money to get into politics.

Ms MALONE: So it is an important issue.

Ms CRAWFORD: Mary Crawford. I am the former member for Forde and I am pre social media. I think social media has changed the environment in which people operate. My understanding is that people's families and children are being targeted—not that that did not happen before, but it was not to the same extent and not so constantly as now. I wonder if in fact the difficulty in getting people to run now is made worse by the negative impacts of social media and so on.

Prof. BROWNING: I absolutely agree with you, Mary. In fact, in the pathway to politics program we now run e-safety seminars for our women, and that is to keep them safe online and safe campaigning physically. That is not a very attractive proposition for people. It is huge.

Mr BOSWELL: My time in politics was certainly before social media, but it never worried me what people said about me; I could not care less. People say that is not right. People used to write things against me. That never worried me. I think that is part of the game. You have to have pretty broad shoulders to go in, and if you take offence to anything people say then maybe it is not for you. It does affect some people. People are concerned about their families being trawled through. It is definitely a negative. The main negative for me is: how do you provide for your future? It is a career interrupter. How do you, after spending 30 years in politics, walk out and not be able to get a reasonable superannuation? You can get kicked out of parliament at age 35 or 40 and you cannot collect your superannuation until you are 65. Those are the things that I think stop people going in.

Mr MICKEL: I make this point: Deakin University have done a whole lot of work on people who lose their seats. The issue is that there is a financial constraint and, to the point that Ron keeps making, if you look at the Queensland parliament now, the election will be on 26 October. It will be about two weeks before that result is decided, so you are running into November. Many people have to get another job. Everybody says, 'Oh, it's just the politician.' No, it will be staffers; if the government changes, it will be ministerial staffers. They all have to get a job and, by the way, merry Christmas. Running up to that is a period of financial hardship for a lot of families, particularly those in public life.

The government—I do not know which one it was—introduced the notion that you get three months' severance pay. Let me tell you what rubbish that is. If you have done nine years, you just about qualify, in any job I know of, for long service leave. You qualify for annual leave, and that would get added on. Believe it or not, that comes to just shy of about six months, and we are offering people three. Ray, I am looking at you to say, mate, fix it up and bring it into line.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Change of government, John.

Mr MICKEL: That is right. What I am saying is that the *Courier-Mail* will make the six months sound like a rort. I will be in there in the papers cheering you on because all it is is bringing it into line with what Brisbane

every one of these people in the workforce get. In other words, every year I was here they took something off me—every year I was here—and now that they have taken the superannuation from people they want to crib you for what everybody else in the workforce would get. There you are.

Ms MALONE: We have time for one more question or, if everything runs really fast, two.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: For John, I am an ex-tradie. For Ron, I am ex-businessman. For Vicky, thank you for teaching me leadership at QUT a long time ago. Why am I running for parliament after what these wonderful people have just said? I am running as an Independent. I have no choice but to run as an Independent because the party that I am a member of, the Australian Democrats, does not have 550 members here in this state. If we want to make a better democracy, we need to ask ourselves about the duopoly we have before us—the duopoly that blocks the smaller parties and makes it more difficult for the little parties to get up and have a run. I am proud to say that I studied leadership under you and I think QUT does a great job.

Ms MALONE: Do you have a question there, Chris?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The question is: what do we do better? How do we fix it? How do we change it?

Ms MALONE: How do we change the duopoly?

Mr MICKEL: The duopoly is changing. The crossbench in the House of Representatives has never been larger. At a state level you have a number of Katters, a number of Independents, two Greens and a Pauline Hanson who has changed his mind—or, rather, Pauline Hanson has fallen out with yet another bloke. If you want to widen it up then take it on and stop all this populist crap that people go into politics for money. You do not make money in politics. There has to be a qualifying period. Even if we backdated it 20 years, it would be interesting to see how many people would have qualified under the old system. Believe it or not, when you walk out there is not an adoring crowd waiting to pick you up.

Mr BOSWELL: I see democracy in Australia as being pretty fair. Anyone can stand. You have to get certain signatures before you can have party status, but that does not stop you from running as an Independent. I think democracy in Australia is absolutely fair. It encourages people to stand if they want to stand. I do not see any handbrake on political parties such as the Democrats. If they cannot get 500 members or 500 signatures or a member of parliament then there has to be some threshold to get through. I see Australia as open and democracy as open. Anyone can have a go. It encourages people to stand.

Ms MALONE: Matthew, did you have a question?

Mr RAMM: Good evening, ladies and gentleman. I am Matthew Ramm. It looks like I am the youngest person in the room.

Ms MALONE: There are a few young people.

Mr RAMM: It was a joke. As you know, I am a young person and I aspire to be in politics. When I look at politics, it comes back to me that it is about community and also putting residents first. Having an opportunity to make a difference is a real privilege. My question to one of you is: what would be your advice for young people who aspire to be future politicians?

Mr BOSWELL: I certainly would encourage anyone who wanted to be a politician. I would absolutely go out of my way, and I have; I have mentored a number of people. What usually happens is that they go out into the real world and make money, and then you ask them to go and cut their income by 50 per cent to run for politics. That is what has happened not once but on at least four or five occasions. You can be altruistic and you can want to do the right thing—you are young and altruistic and you have a vision and that is terrific—but in the end you still have to be able to live. You have to be able to fund your family; you have to be able to retire. The ability to do this has disappeared over the last 15 years. Yes, go for it: if you want to be a politician, go for it. I will encourage you. I will even help you.

Mr MICKEL: He has helped too many! If you want to go into it, I would suggest to you: at your age, be keen and be enthusiastic. You said that community was big for you. Well, get involved in the community because fewer and fewer people are. The Lions clubs, the Rotary clubs—their numbers are going down. Get involved in sporting clubs because they really need people out there who will fight for better facilities. If you want to know where to start, I will give you an address at Salisbury. But do that: get involved in the community.

Mr RAMM: I already do that.

Who Wants to be a Member of Parliament?

Mr MICKEL: Great. Keep doing it, because one day you will seize the opportunity and you will go in with a breadth of experience. It is the breadth of experience that, frankly, we are after.

Ms MALONE: That brings the forum to an end. I would like to thank everyone for your questions. That was a very rich and lively discussion. I would like you to join me in thanking the panellists: Vicky Browning, John Mickel and Ron Boswell.

Mr MICKEL: And don't forget to buy the book!

Ms MALONE: Thank you all for attending. Please join us now for refreshments where there will be plenty of opportunity to catch up with people, have a good chat and further the discussion of the topic tonight. Good evening, everybody.

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