



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

**AUSTRALIAN ELECTION STUDY 2019 AND
QUEENSLAND'S 2020 ELECTION IN RETROSPECT**

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020

Brisbane

THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020

Mr FRASER: Welcome to the first ASPG function for this year. We planned to have a function in March, but that came to grief. We felt that we had an obligation to try to put something on this year. When things started moving again, we felt a bit more relaxed about doing something and the parliament became a little more receptive to having functions. As most of you know, my name is David Fraser. I am the chairman of the ASPG Queensland. Welcome to you all.

At the beginning of the year we had asked Sarah Cameron from the University of Sydney to participate in one of our functions by presenting her federal election study. We basically had everything ready to go in March but, as you all appreciate, that fell apart. We subsequently discovered that Sarah was essentially spending most of this year in Brisbane, so we thought we would take the opportunity to invite her along again. We decided in this instance to combine that with our traditional post state election discussion.

To help us with that discussion tonight, because we are even-handed, we have a representative from what you might term the left side of politics, John Mickel—

Mr MICKEL: I have never been on the left in my life!

Mr FRASER: I know that, but it is the easiest way to describe you, isn't it? Forget the left and the right. John Mickel used to be the Labor Speaker of the Queensland parliament. He held a number of ministries and distinguished himself in those positions. Is that all right?

Mr MICKEL: Yes, that is better.

Mr FRASER: On the other side, which I will not say as left or right—

Mr YOUNG: I am happy with right.

Mr FRASER:—is Graham Young, who participated in our function three years ago when we discussed the 2017 election. Graham is the executive director of the Australian Institute for Progress and a former vice-president of the Queensland Liberal Party. To round that off and to bring a bit of sense to the discussion, we invited Ben Smee from the *Guardian* in Brisbane to give a journalists' perspective on the campaign—both the campaign itself and the outcome of that campaign.

What we propose to do is that Sarah will make her presentation first. We will then open it to John and Graham to speak for roughly 10 minutes each on their perspectives. Ben will make his presentation. Then we will have a general discussion and a Q&A covering the four speakers. We felt that was a better way to do it, rather than cutting in after each person. We will have a free-for-all at the end of the evening. To round it off, we will have some wine and nibbles. The more invigorating the debate the more you might feel inclined to drink.

Sarah, welcome to Brisbane. It is a belated welcome. Thank you for staying in Brisbane. I invite you to make a presentation.

Dr CAMERON: Thank you very much to the Australasian Study of Parliament Group for the invitation to be here and also for you all coming along. I will be talking through some of our results from the Australian Election Study including, in particular, what shaped the election result last year. That seems like a lifetime away now but, with our short electoral cycles in Australia, it is never too long before the next federal election. Then, because we are in such a different position now with the current crisis than we were last year, I will conclude with some reflections on the implications of COVID-19 for voters' attitudes towards government.

The Australian Election Study is the major study in Australia of federal elections. It has been ongoing since 1987 and has fielded representative surveys of Australians after each federal election since the 1980s. The last survey had over 2,000 respondents. It is a collaborative project. On the 2019 study I worked closely with Ian McAllister and Jill Sheppard, both at the Australian National University. Many other contributors have worked on the project as well. We have all of our data and reports available on our website. I have also left some of our reports over by the refreshments area. You are welcome to take them, if you would like.

To provide a bit of a picture as to what shaped voting behaviour in last year's election, I will begin with a very simple question that we ask voters: what was the most important factor shaping people's decisions when they cast their ballots? What this shows is that an overwhelming majority said that policy

issues were the most important consideration—66 per cent in 2019, which is actually the highest it had been since the GST was the factor in the election in 1998. Around 20 per cent said that political parties were the most important factor, and less than 10 per cent each said that leaders or the local candidate were their top consideration.

A majority said that policy issues were shaping their vote. We can drill down to see what were the most important policy issues to voters. The most important issue in last year's election was management of the economy, at 24 per cent, followed by health and Medicare. Then, if we combine a couple of indicators—the environment and global warming—the environment is the third most important issue. In terms of trends over time, management of the economy and health always tend to be among the top issues.

In these top issues we see considerable differences among voters for different parties. Among Coalition voters, an overwhelming majority said that economic issues were the most important consideration shaping their vote, whereas Labor voters are a lot more diverse in their issue priorities. Around a third said it was health, closely followed by the environment and the economy. Unsurprisingly, a majority of Greens voters were driven by environmental concerns.

Looking at these different policy issues, the parties have advantages in different areas. Voters prefer the Coalition's policies on economic issues and also on immigration and refugees, although neither were particularly salient in last year's election. Labor is the preferred party on health, on education and on environmental issues. When we look at these trends over time, the preferences that voters have for the different parties in particular areas are fairly stable and fairly consistent over time.

We can see one example of this with taxation. The Coalition has a longstanding advantage on this issue area. This was interesting in the 2019 election because tax was a big area of focus with Labor's policies on negative gearing and franking credits. This suggests that it was not advantageous to Labor that there was such a focus on tax issues because it is an issue area where voters consistently prefer the Coalition's policies.

There was also a lot of talk in the lead-up to last year's election about 2019 being the climate change election. Do we see support for that in our data? We see some support for this. If we look at the trends over time—this is the percentage of voters that identify the environment or global warming as being the most important factor shaping the vote—we can see that environmental issues were more important in the 2019 election than in any other election on record. These percentages had doubled since the 2016 election. It was a much more important issue—the most important issue for about one in five voters. As we saw in that earlier graph, still there were more voters who saw economic issues and also health issues as being important.

With a more general question about whether voters see global warming as important, we see that a majority of voters, and a majority of voters for all of the different parties, do see global warming as being an important issue, even if it was not the most important issue. We see a bit of a difference between the political parties, with Labor and Greens voters more likely than Coalition voters to see it as an extremely important issue.

Another factor that was talked about a lot in the election last year was leadership. There were two factors that were interesting in last year's election: Bill Shorten's unpopularity, which was frequently discussed; and also that we had yet another change of Prime Minister in the term of government leading up to the election when Scott Morrison replaced Malcolm Turnbull. We have some data on this from the survey.

We ask a question about the popularity of party leaders: how much do you like the party leader on a scale from zero to 10? The results show the average popularity of different party leaders not just in the 2019 election but also in other elections going back to 1987. What this shows is that Bill Shorten was extremely unpopular—the most unpopular leader of a major party since 1990. In both 2016 and 2019 he had a lower level of popularity than any election winner on record. Had Labor won last year's election—which of course they did not—it would have been an historically unusual result for such an unpopular leader to lead a party to a win.

If we look at Scott Morrison, he was evaluated on average at 5.1 out of 10—so not particularly popular. We can see here that he was the most popular Prime Minister after an election since Kevin Rudd in 2007. That is because in the 2010, 2013 and 2016 elections the leaders were particularly unpopular. Of course, there are big differences between voters for different parties on how they evaluate the leaders.

Sometimes people ask: why is Bill Shorten so unpopular? We ask another set of questions about leadership characteristics and how well they describe the different party leaders. It shows that the areas where voters had concerns about Bill Shorten were in terms of honesty and trustworthiness and they did not see him as being inspiring. Looking at these trends for both 2016 and 2019, Bill Shorten was the least well evaluated in the history of the Election Study. It was always going to be a challenge for Labor to win an election with an unpopular leader.

One of the charts I showed earlier showed that a very small percentage of voters are casting their ballots based on leadership—just seven per cent in the 2019 election. What is shown here is how an unpopular or popular leader can really make a difference in shifting votes. If you look to Kevin Rudd when he was leader, in the 2007 election 20 per cent of Labor voters cast their ballots based on his leadership. In 2019, for Bill Shorten it was just four per cent. One thing that we see in other studies is that swing voters are more likely to cast their votes based on leadership. That is another reason why having a popular or unpopular leader can really make a difference in elections, even if more voters cast their ballots based on policy issues.

Another factor that has been interesting not just in the last election but over the past 10 years in Australian politics is this merry-go-round of prime ministers that we have had. We have had six prime ministers over an eight-year period from 2010 to 2018. During that time only one change of prime minister came about as a result of an election. That was in 2013 when Abbott led the Liberal Party. Our data shows that an overwhelming majority of voters have disapproved of these leadership changes. Three-quarters disapproved how the change from Turnbull to Morrison was handled, which was the same level of disapproval as when Julia Gillard replaced Kevin Rudd in 2010.

There are a couple of reasons this leadership change might not have had a big impact on voting behaviour in last year's election. One factor is that the change happened in August 2018 and then the election did not take place for another nine months. Although voters really disapproved of this, it was no longer at the front of their minds. When Labor did this, on the other hand, the leadership change had happened much closer to the election, so it was more of a salient consideration. Also in the change from Turnbull to Morrison, Morrison was not the one who instigated the removal of Malcolm Turnbull, so he avoids some of the blame in that sense for bringing about this switch in leadership.

Some other trends that have been interesting in our data are evidence of an increasingly divided electorate. I will show a few trends around this, the first being in terms of gender differences. In the 2019 election, we saw that men were much more likely to vote for the Coalition—by a margin of 10 percentage points—and more women were voting for the Greens. When you look at the data over time, it is actually the case that the gender gap has reversed over time. Back in the 1990s women were more likely to vote for the Liberal Party by a small margin and men were more likely to vote Labor. Over time that gap has reversed and it has widened, particularly in the 2019 election. That is something that is seen not just in Australia but in other countries around the world as well, with women moving further to the left and men to the right.

We also see big age differences in voting behaviour—the youngest voters voting primarily for Labor and the Greens and then, if you look at the 65s and over, a majority voting for the Coalition. Once again we can look at the trends over time to see whether this is a new development or a continuation of what has happened in previous elections. It is a bit of both. Young people have always been a bit further to the left than older people but we are seeing a growing division based on age. Younger people are increasingly less likely to vote for the Liberal Party and more likely to vote for the Greens. We have seen the age gap really widen over time.

Another area that has been discussed in explaining last year's election result is: is it the case that working-class voters are moving towards the Coalition? We have a question in our surveys where we ask people to identify themselves as either working class, middle class or upper class. Not many people see themselves as upper class, so I have not included this here. Our results show that the working class are still more likely to vote for Labor. If we look at the data over time, it is showing a gradual erosion of Labor's working-class base, not so much in favour of the Liberal Party but votes for minor parties are increasing over time. Labor still has the working-class vote, but it is deteriorating to some degree over time.

I have presented a lot of different factors that were important in last year's election. What I do here is create an overall picture of what shaped voting behaviour in the election. Over 20 per cent saw the economy as being the most important issue. Then you can see for people who voted for different reasons

what way they voted. Those voting based on the economy overwhelmingly voted for the Coalition. Those voting based on the parties as a whole were evenly split between Labor and the Coalition. Labor and the Greens have a big advantage among those voting based on the environment. The Coalition has an advantage for those voting based on leadership.

We can also look at the voting behaviour of swing voters—those who voted for the Coalition in last year's election but have previously voted Labor or those who voted Labor but have voted for the Coalition at some point in the past. What our results show is that there were swings towards the Coalition particularly on the economy and also on leadership. There were swings towards Labor based on health and particularly the environment. If we look at this as a whole, we can see that there are more voters that shifted from Labor to the Coalition based on the economy and leadership than those going from the Coalition to Labor based on the environment.

One other area I will touch upon that has been remarkable in our survey results is increasing evidence of citizen disaffection with the political system. In 2019 voters' trust in government was at its lowest level on record, with just one in four voters believing people in government could be trusted. Satisfaction with democracy had also reached its lowest level since the Whitlam dismissal and constitutional crisis in the 1970s. Placing Australia in comparison to other countries, back in 2007, following Labor's win, Australia would have been right up the top of this graph here along with Norway and Switzerland, with 86 per cent of Australians satisfied with democracy. We are now around the middle of the pack among OECD countries.

There have been various explanations for what might be driving this. People often ask: is it young people who are so dissatisfied with politics? Is it social media that is driving this? When we compare the trends in Australia to other comparable democracies, we can see that there is something unique happening in Australia that has not been happening necessarily elsewhere because the trends are quite stable in Canada and New Zealand. We do see a decline in satisfaction with democracy in the UK, particularly after Brexit, and in the United States, particularly following the 2016 election of Donald Trump.

The rate of decline in satisfaction with democracy in Australia is steeper here than elsewhere. Results from the Australian Election Study suggest that it is primarily driven by government performance, including the leadership changes that people have been very dissatisfied with and other areas of government performance. We should be cautious of this tendency to blame things on social media and the youth because we can compare Australia to other countries that also have social media and young people but do not have these problems of deteriorating satisfaction with democracy.

That wraps up my remarks on the 2019 Australian federal election. I will conclude with some thoughts on what has changed this year. Of course, with the COVID-19 crisis, we are in a very different situation. Research on previous crises gives us some indications as to the potential effects of COVID-19 on democratic politics.

Something that previous studies have found is that in times of crisis—for example, military threats and terrorism—there is a tendency for voters to rally around the flag, by which I mean people giving greater support to incumbent leaders and incumbent governments at a time of crisis. An example of this is in 2001 following 9-11. George W Bush's approval ratings skyrocketed at that time of crisis. At the same time there is also a lot of research on how economic conditions influence voter behaviour and attitudes and the idea that when the economy is doing poorly people punish the government for poor economic performance.

The crisis that we are in at the moment is a unique crisis, combining a major health crisis with a related economic crisis. A key factor here would be how well the government is handling the crisis and how well the government is doing in comparison to other countries also facing these challenges.

We can look at approval data for leaders—Scott Morrison in Australia as well as Boris Johnson and Donald Trump—to see whether there is evidence of this 'rally around the flag' effect. There has been a 'rally around the flag' effect in Australia at the beginning of the pandemic. Scott Morrison got a big boost in support. Support for Morrison was lower before that, around the time of the bushfire crisis, when the government, and Scott Morrison in particular, was perceived as not handling the crisis well. We have seen with COVID a jump in support for Scott Morrison and it has remained high over time.

If we look at Boris Johnson, on the other hand, we see that big boost in approval at the time of March-April, the first lockdown. Instead of remaining high over time, it has deteriorated. There are big differences in how well the UK and Australia have handled the COVID crisis which would explain why Scott

Morrison has retained this very unusually high level of support, whereas that has not been the case in other countries. Donald Trump just got a small boost in support around April but that then deteriorated to some degree after that as cases rose in the United States.

We have some other data on this in Australia in terms of voters' levels of confidence in government. I previously showed our results from the 2019 study, which showed voters' record low levels of trust in government. If we look at figures going from 2019 through to this year at different points in time it shows us that, although confidence was low at the beginning of the year, it really jumped up at the beginning of the pandemic and has remained high over time for both state and federal governments. We do see the Victorian state government lose some confidence around the time of the second wave of the virus. In Queensland we see an additional boost in confidence for the state government in August, at the time the border was shut for the second time. We started the year with record low levels of trust, though COVID has increased confidence in government and support for incumbents.

Thank you so much for your attention. I will certainly be happy to take any questions after the other speakers.

Mr FRASER: I now invite John Mickel to give his perspective on the 2020 state election.

Mr MICKEL: The state election was, quite simply, shaped by COVID and the response to it. What we found—at the state level anyway—is that there was this remarkable unison with everybody about state institutions being there to protect them. The Chief Health Officer is the one who is out there reassuring everybody. There was hesitation in the major papers about whether this was a good thing or a bad thing, and the *Courier-Mail* basically settled on the fact that it was a bad thing that the borders were closed. I sense it probably reflected its diminished readership, but it did not reflect the general population. The general population does not read the newspapers, so the view of the *Courier-Mail* was one of reflecting its readership to some extent but one not shared by the general public. The opposition responded to that and therefore did not have a clear message going into the campaign on whether they were for the closure or wanted to keep it locked up. They responded in the sense of their constituency—I get that—the small business constituency, who felt they were doing it tough and wanted the borders open. For the Labor Party it was playing to one of their key strengths, which was health and health concerns.

Morrison, whilst he remained popular in Queensland, managed to do what he did with the Turnbull thing. That is, he benefited from the Turnbull thing by not having blood on his hands. He tried the same caper with COVID by sending Dutton and Birmingham to do over the Premier for keeping the borders closed, which played into the hands of southerners telling Queensland what to do. That bolstered the strength of the Premier so that by August she is started to lift. All she needs from that is one or two things, and it came along. It needed a split in the Liberal National Party, which came along when Hutchinson, I think it was, decided to sandbag her leadership. So what you had was strong, steady leadership from the government and questionable leadership from the other side. Frecklington managed to see that down and got a bit of a lift from that, but the damage was done.

That is the scenario going into the election. What the Premier had to do then was show that she had a plan for recovery, so she borrowed the Tony Abbott playbook: you have the cover and you wander around with the cover saying, 'Look, I have a plan for recovery.' Abbott got away with it and so did she. In relation to the campaign itself, the Premier always starts badly in a campaign. This time she started well. The first two weeks she won it, the third week she did not—it was a narrow win to the LNP—and the fourth week was just a mess. But we are entering a new cycle here where the majority of people are voting early, so it was important to win early and the Premier won early.

There was not a single day when the advance team for the Premier had not done their job and the pictures were always good. She always came out smiling and confident. One lesson you would learn from this is that if you are going to run for politics, get somebody to clean up your social media. There is nothing worse than going to one of the most marginal seats in the state with the leader and then somebody pulling out the fact that 'you didn't want Morrison to be the leader, you wanted Pauline Hanson' or whatever it was in Mundingburra, and it was readily available on social media. They did not even have to do great research, and that killed the message for the day when the opposition really needed to come home in Mundingburra. Social media can be a good thing. In that case it was a bad thing because the advance work had not been done, and Labor was able to benefit from that.

The other thing is that the opposition at no stage during the campaign and no stage leading up to it made a case for change. If you look at the campaign it was positive but it never, ever focused on Labor's weaknesses, which were considerable. It never focused on them. You can argue, as one of the journalists

has argued, that COVID was and is the greatest get-out-of-jail-free card for incumbent governments. When you look at it federally with robodebt, sports rorts and the Berejiklian government—which is just bordering on hopeless—none of those things matter when the get-out-of-jail-free card is COVID, and so it was in Queensland. All of the sins of the past are eradicated because you are 'keeping them safe'. I think that played into the campaign as well.

The other thing is that whoever did the funding of the LNP policy—David, get their names and make sure they are not employed. You cannot have a leader running around saying, 'We're going to build the dam up in North Queensland. We're going to four-lane the Bruce Highway,' and then when the costings come out two days before the election they do not have a cent for any of it. Your credibility with the 11 per cent who have not made up their minds is just shot to bits. They were lucky in that the *Courier-Mail* did not pick it up, but it was there nevertheless that the centrepiece of the policy was going to be funded, create all the jobs and all the other stuff, in 10 to 15 years time—maybe. Labor was able to sell, 'We've got the strong plan,' and that was just a fundamental weakness on behalf of the LNP.

There are myths around, and tonight I want to slash the myths. The first one is that campaigns these days are very presidential. A Queensland campaign has always been presidential—always—and never has not been. Ryan, Theodore, Forgan Smith, Hanlon, Gair, Nicklin, Bjelke-Petersen—always presidential. It is always going to be determined—as the federal campaign is always determined—on leadership. If the Premier has the edge on the leadership, that is always going to help bring you home.

The second myth, which I have heard from so many LNP people, is, 'Labor is so much better at state campaigning than we are. We just can't do it.' Really? In Queensland? Labor held one Senate spot last time, the worst Senate result since proportional representation was introduced in the 1940s. It is the same old Labor Party: they just cannot ever bring it home federally, but they somehow can at a state level because they are great campaigners. I will tell you what great campaigners they are. At the Brisbane City Council election, with a 16-year-old administration—Labor after 16 years in opposition—the same organisation wins five wards, the same as they had, and goes backwards in the mayoralty. Yet nine months later this incompetent organisation—and it takes a fair challenge after 16 years to go backwards—is supposed to be the great campaigners in the state election. It is covering up the fact that the LNP at the state election was just incompetent. How else would you sandbag your leader halfway through the campaign by leaking it that you have referred her to the ECQ? Even if it did not happen, the voters were left with the impression. Then, just to make sure that I had not missed that point as a commentator, on election night three LNP luminaries scuttle on board the sinking boat that is the Palmer boat. Three of them! And just to make sure that I see it, it is on the front page of the *Sunday Mail* the next day. Some mothers do have 'em! But you cannot help a show like that. They are never going to win at a state level when that is what they are presenting.

The other point is that this is the first time since 1923 and 1926 that an opposition has gone backwards consecutively in two elections. It has been managed by other parties in other jurisdictions, but in Queensland this is the first time they have gone backwards. Labor was in opposition for 32 years under some dreadfully incompetent people and it did not manage that. When you say they cannot win at a state level, it is rubbish. What they need is to pull it together. Time will tell whether that can happen.

I was interested in your analysis on where Labor is getting votes from. In this election it seemed to me that the seats that were won tended to be open seats: Caloundra, where Mark retired; and Pumicestone, where the one-time member retired. In the absence of exit polls what I am about to say next may not be right, but there seemed to me to be a correlation this time in age, where you had electors who were low-income retirees with a significant percentage of those normally, as your analysis said, over 65—and there is nothing wrong with being over 65; I recommend it. The point is that I do not think Labor won the majority there. I think it ate into it but not across the board. I think it ate into it in low-income retirees. That is what I think. I do not have any exit polls to prove it.

The second thing is that this election, because Labor campaigned on health and then jobs in the regions—and it is certainly there federally and it was slipping that way at a state level—is the first time in a long time that Labor has managed to hold and win seats in every provincial city in Queensland. This time it retained a seat on the Gold Coast and won two on the Sunshine Coast—it is true that at various times they have had one or the other, but never both—and then Hervey Bay, Bundaberg and Maryborough and all the way up the coast. What that says to me is that Labor, for the first time in a long time, won non-college educated white voters. That trend is what helped Trump get 70 million people to vote for him, because he made massive inroads into that non-college educated white person demographic. This time Labor at a state level won those people for a variety of reasons.

In closing, I would say that what is here to stay is early voting. This is not a COVID related thing. People who voted early like the comfort of voting early. There might be a mix and match whether they go postal votes or pre-poll, but that is here to stay. The second thing arising from that is that I think we again need to set up an EARC process. That EARC process served us well for this reason. I think at the moment the counting of votes reflects an old style. I cannot for the life of me understand why, for the pre-poll votes that have been cast, names crossed off, we cannot have a process during polling day where those votes are counted so that at six o'clock they are just placed straight into the pile.

If you have a look at election night commentary—and I was there with the agony of it, and people in this room were helping me marvellously trying to get the results out—there is this pregnant pause between the results on the day and waiting to see whether the early votes have overturned it. I get it that you can do a little bit about the postal votes, but you cannot do a lot.

I want to say this about postal votes. We also have to recognise this reality with postal votes. I think the Electoral Commission has to be allowed to send out the applications far earlier than they do. At the moment it is when the writs are issued. Here is the problem. The problem is getting more and more pronounced, but it is there. As the cost of the postal service is going up, the quality of the service delivered is going down. I think there were a lot of country people this time who get mail service runs who applied for a postal vote as a matter of course and did not get it. As you know, unless the thing is postmarked on the day, that vote does not count. It seems to me that whole process needs to be brought forward so that people are not disadvantaged if they have applied or have no choice other than to get a postal vote. I notice James McGrath has made some recommendations at a federal level, but it seems to me that the postal vote system—and it is a very good system—needs to be looked at in terms of times.

The other thing is that I think the government was wrong—grievously wrong, capriciously—when it changed the voting system. It is wrong, wrong, wrong. That should have been subject to an EARC process. There was only one seat you could argue would have changed with the previous voting system—optional preferential—and that is Nicklin. That is open to some debate, but if you are going to tinker with these things at all they should be the subject of a proper process. That was wrong and I am here to condemn it as wrong. Other than that, the next thing is, 'Let's have a go at the boundaries ourselves.' We want a fair system. We do not want what the United States is going through. In a fair system you open it up for discussion, get the discussion points in and do it the appropriate way.

I say that too because the ECQ is going through a pile of regulation at the moment. I was down at a polling booth on election day and the queue was right outside the door. It was hot as buggery. 'Buggery' is a Logan expression for really hot. I said to the guy, 'Why are they lined up outside the door? Why aren't there more people?' He said, 'Mate, I'm not here for that. I'm here to measure up the signs.' Why? Because some idiot introduced this thing about the size of the signs. Apparently, the Libs' were two centimetres too big, so they had to spend the day running around cutting the damn things up. It was just insane! The more regulation you introduce, the more nonsense that has to go on. They had people running around measuring these things up while people were lined up outside the door. I think this sort of thing needs a proper EARC process. What we are finding is that the ECQ on the day is spending more and more time attending to regulation.

The Palmer caper—what everybody has done with Palmer is made sure that there are only a certain amount of donations per candidate and all that sort of stuff. What did Palmer do? Palmer essentially ran a people's action committee called a political party. All you have to do is nominate 93 candidates and you can spend a million bucks each, or whatever the hell it is, and away he went getting around the act. The more of this drivel that you put in, the more they have to take the focus away from administering elections and get on to a prosecutorial role. If we are going to have that, if that is the new accepted norm, then it should be part of an EARC process.

I sympathise with the Libs on this. The whole deal now is that if you are a property developer you cannot donate. Would somebody tell me what the definition of a property developer is? I get it that it could be Hutchies. I get that. But what about if I want to split a block with one of you? Are we property developers? I do not know. On the other hand, the unions are allowed to give as much as they like. We are discriminating between the types of voters who can give and those who cannot give. If it is all right for one, why is it not all right for another? A proper EARC process would determine that.

My final point is the how-to-vote cards. More than half of the people now who are coming in are taking none of it, and of those who take any of it 40 per cent take something and only a third of those follow it. Yet there is an awful lot of time and effort that goes into how-to-vote cards. I do not want to ban them. All I want

to do is get real with it. Why not just put the damn things in a book in the polling booths so that if you want to vote a particular way you can thumb through it and there it is. Why? The feedback from the Brisbane City Council elections, when they could not hand them out, is that everybody was relieved they did not have to run the gauntlet. Again, there should be a proper EARC process. Is that the best way to do it or should it be displayed? I get it that you want to encourage people to cast a formal vote.

What we saw in the council election when there were two by-elections, one on the Gold Coast and one in Bundamba, is that the informal vote went up at the state level, because at one level it was optional preferential voting and at the other level it was compulsory preferential voting. Without a how-to-vote card, the informal vote went up in the by-elections. The way to get around that—the major parties will not go along with it—in the interests of fairness, would be to have it in there in the book and you can leaf through it if you want to.

The final point is the role of the Electoral Commission. It is a sad fact, but true, that at primary school I think they do a little thing on government when they waltz in here and get their orange juice, and that is their visit to parliament. That is about the only interaction most kids have with the parliamentary system. How good was the orange juice at Parliament House? There is none of it done at high school, and now I am sad to say that in the Queensland university system there are no government subjects taught: no Australian government, no state government, no local government and no Australian history. It is a complete and utter disgrace. Where are people getting their information? Increasingly, the ECQ may have to think about whether it provides that civics role.

The second thing is: should the ECQ just be passive in its dealing with government, or should it take it up to the minister and say, 'These are the faults we find'? I believe it should be. They are public servants, and if they find fault in the way the thing is administered they should be proactive and take it up to a minister to get a better system. For all of those faults, it is infinitely better than the United States on its best day. Thank you very much.

Mr FRASER: Thank you, John. I will now call on Graham Young to tell us what he thinks.

Mr YOUNG: Thanks very much, David. Ladies and gentlemen, I have not actually prepared this because the problem with being second speaker—and I empathise with Ben, because it is an even bigger problem being third speaker—is that the first speaker eats your lunch, and in this case he may have eaten my dinner as well.

Mr MICKEL: Yes, I agree.

Mr YOUNG: I agree with some of what John said. The last piece where he is talking about property developers and donations I thought was completely on point. My think tank has been waging a bit of a campaign on that for the last two or three years, because it is ridiculous that people are disqualified from donating on the basis of their occupation rather than their character. If you are a criminal, I think that is an issue. If you are an upstanding citizen, I do not think it is a problem, whatever industry it is you work in. We have a unity ticket there, but I am not here to talk about that. I am here to talk about the election.

For those of you who do not know some of the things I do, since 2001 I have been doing qualitative polling of elections around Australia. I have about 13,500 people around Australia who fill in my surveys. Unlike Sarah, I do not ask closed questions; I ask open questions. I say, 'How are you going to vote?' That is a closed question. 'Why are you going to do that?' That is an open question. It is just completely up to them. That gives me a view which is very instructive. I have come to similar conclusions to what Sarah came to in terms of federal elections as to what people are doing, what particular sorts of voters are doing and why.

When you look at the Queensland election it was a COVID election, but it did not need to be a COVID election in the way that it was a COVID election. I did three polls during the course of the Queensland election. I did one in September, I did one two weeks out and I did one that was an exit survey. It is not technically an exit survey because you are not getting people as they come out from having voted, but I ask them on the day that they vote, or the day after, or the day after that. I want to get to them before they have been polluted by what journalists from the *Guardian* and the *Courier-Mail* and so on tell them are the reasons they voted. Sorry, Ben, you will get a right of reply later. I have a reasonable idea as to what is going on in people's heads.

In September COVID was a fact of life and people were looking past COVID. They wanted to know about the reboot. If you look at the government's advertising in that period of time it confirms that my research was right. If you look at what they were talking about, it was the plan—the document with the

photos on it and so on that John said they had under their arm and they were gesturing with. That has been a feature of a lot of campaigns. The best riposte I have ever heard to the plan was Paul Keating, who said, 'The Liberals might have a plan. It is the wrong plan.' This time the LNP did not say that. In fact, the LNP did not appear to have a plan. Labor's plan was pretty skinny, but if you are not critiquing the other side then no-one picks it up. It is not a journalist's job—it kind of is a journalist's job—to pick those things up, but journalists are pretty busy trying to cover campaigns and they are not going to delve into it in detail. If the opposition is not looking at what the government is doing and exposing the problems in it then it is not going to get into the news.

Part of what happened in this election was that you had a Labor Party that had a pretty skinny plan. You had an LNP who said they had a plan but really could not explain it, apart from the dual-laning of the Bruce Highway, and they had a pie-in-the-sky project, the New Bradfield Scheme. That has been around for about 100 years now, so you can forgive voters for being a bit pessimistic as to whether that is going to be delivered. As John said, in the last week there was no money allocated towards it, so if you were voting on Saturday and you had been paying attention then this bold new vision was not actually there. What you got on the LNP how-to-vote cards was, 'We'll give you \$300 off your car registration.' I do not think that is a compelling pitch. I do not think voters want to be bought on election day with a Harvey Norman, 'Here's \$300 off your car rego.' I do not think that is going to cut it.

On the other side you have the ALP. Their plan was not much, but they had this slogan they kept pushing home which was, 'She's strong. She's kept us safe.' That was their message. I got that off a T-shirt, but that was their message. It was not quite the slogan they were running, but that was their message. Her strength was proven, in a sense, because she told Scott Morrison and Gladys Berejiklian that she was not going to open the borders. Personally, I do not think that is strong at all. That is like stopping road carnage by forcing people to keep their cars locked up in the garage and it is not particularly useful, but the opposition never bought into that in a sensible way. They said, 'We need to open the borders'—64 times apparently, according to Labor—which Labor managed to turn into a negative on the LNP. If they had focused on some of the areas where it affected people they could have mounted an argument which dismantled that. They did not.

What had to happen in this election for the Labor Party to lose or the LNP to win? The Labor Party had this big no-man's-land between them and the LNP because one of the problems the LNP has in this state is that, loosely speaking, the right-of-centre vote is fractured. You have the three Katter Australia Party members and in the centre of Queensland you have the one One Nation member, which is a barrier they have to cross. After this last election Labor also has a little bit of a barrier there. They have two Greens members they have to keep on one side so they can form a majority government. But for the LNP to get there they had to win nine seats, which is a lot. We are looking at an election where there was about a two per cent swing to Labor. It was not a big swing in terms of the number of seats they picked up. They really only picked up a few seats, but it is really interesting when you look at it geographically.

John mentioned the city council earlier. In the city council Labor has five seats out of 26. In the same area the LNP has four seats out of 20 something. I cannot quite give you the exact figure. There is something drastically wrong on both sides at those two levels of government. When you look at the seats the LNP had to win there was Aspley and Mansfield. They were both seats where you had first-term members. What happens when you have a first-term member is the previous member disappears, and assuming they had some degree of popularity their personal vote disappears. Then the member coming in has three years—now four years—to build a personal vote. John calls that the 'sophomore surge' the SS. Aspley and Mansfield and Mount Ommaney fell into that category—Mount Ommaney was a large margin—and Gaven on the other side. Even though the LNP had good candidates, there has to be a good reason to turf someone out who you have just given the job to, and they were not putting an argument up there for change. They were running a largely positive campaign without any negatives, and so those seats stayed where they were.

Basically, Labor was doing about as well as it was going to do on the Gold Coast and that stayed where it was, although Sam O'Connor got a phenomenal swing to him down there in Bonney, which is something that people ought to look at more closely. On the Sunshine Coast I did not think there were prospects, but as it turned out when the Hon. Mark McArdle hung up his shoes there was a swing in Caloundra. There was also a swing in Nicklin which I did not pick and Hervey Bay, if you put that into the same sort of cluster of seats. What caused that to happen? A retiring member, I think. In most of the seats where there was a change it was a retiring member, so I think you lose the personal vote and there is strength going with the ALP. I also think there was an age demographic issue which was partly COVID

related. If you are my age and older you are at higher risk from COVID, so I think the COVID message bit a little bit stronger there. I also think the voluntary euthanasia issue cut to a certain extent on those issues. It does not have to be broad-based. It does not have to affect 100 per cent of voters for it to be determinant in a swing. It only has to affect one per cent. If you win a seat by five per cent it is reasonably safe, so these things count.

The other thing which stopped a swing was that the LNP needed to win lots of seats in North Queensland. On the basis of the federal election you would say there was a good chance of that happening. I do not want to build John up to much, but we went to a lunch where we all had to put \$50 in the middle of the table and make a prediction as to what was going to happen. He took the money. He was two or three seats, I think it was, more optimistic on Labor than me, so I was not stupid. But where John was right and I was wrong was I thought on the basis of the federal election the LNP would do much better in North Queensland, and they did not. I think that is due to cultural issues to a certain extent. In my polling I find that the LNP is now identified more with the old Liberal Party than the old National Party. There are people in the regions who say, 'These people do not stand for us.' Another complicating factor there is the Katter people ran against the LNP more than Labor because they knew they were the ones they had to beat, and they were in seats like Townsville. So you have Labor, but you also had the Katters running against the Liberals.

You had Annastacia wiping the barnacles off the coal issue by approving a coalmine in the Galilee Basin, so they managed to hold onto those seats. Possibly the LNP overplayed their hand on law and order. They had to win nine seats; Labor just had to keep about two. We ended up with a swing of three, which was these seats essentially in the Sunshine Coast. In Pumicestone—which is basically a Labor seat but for various reasons went to the LNP with a half a per cent margin—that member retired and that went to Labor. You got kind of a status quo election which, off the base of COVID, is not a great result when you look at Jacinda Ardern, who managed for the first time in New Zealand history to get an absolute majority on a proportional representation system. That is a very difficult thing to do. She did that off COVID. Annastacia Palaszczuk got more or less a status quo result. You can look at the individual seats and find individual reasons why they changed.

The challenge for Labor is to get itself into a position where it can maintain this outside of the COVID situation. In four years time they may well be dealing with the economic downdraft from this, and then economics will play a role in it in a way that it did not this time around. The challenge for the LNP is to sort themselves out. They thought that by merging the Liberal Party and the National Party everything would just be fine. What they seem to have ended up with is a kind of Liberal Party without strong regional roots and without a strong grasp of that upper and lower middle class vote which, in my view, has determined elections in Queensland and Australia for as long as I can plot it. If they cannot do that then we are looking at Labor majorities as far as the eye can see. I hope that is not the case, but it may well be.

I am just looking at the things John said. One comment I would make is that John said every election has been presidential and won on leadership in Queensland. That is wrong. In 1995 Rob Borbidge and Joan Sheldon—Rob is just up here next to Peter Beattie. When he had a 19 per cent approval rating the *Courier-Mail* said, 'Why do these two bother?' I was involved in that campaign. We did not run it on a presidential basis, and they got a seven per cent swing during the election campaign. You do not win on the basis of a presidential election unless the opposition is stupid enough to run on the strength of the leader, and Wayne Goss was the most popular politician in Queensland at the time.

I also believe that Labor is much better at a state level at campaigning. The LNP has been hopeless. They will get into government and then they will throw it away after a term. They have done that now twice in my lifetime. The fact that they win at a federal level is an indicator of how good they are federally compared to the state Labor Party. Thank you very much.

Mr FRASER: Thank you very much, Graham. Ben, would you like to cast your journalist's eye over the campaign?

Mr SMEE: Thank you very much for having me. I am going to be short and sweet, and I hope you indulge me referring to some notes. I think one of the benefits of being a print journalist is that I have the ability to revise my thoughts as many times as I need to. Sometimes I can ramble a bit, so I will be referring to my notes a little bit as I go.

The idea that this was something other than a pandemic election just simply is not the case. The pandemic defined it in more significant ways than by simply defining the debate and the key issues that were debated, which were obviously the government's management of the pandemic and a kind of

assessment of their management of the pandemic and then the economic recovery that would come subsequent to that. The coronavirus acted as a sort of disruptor in terms of the way the campaign played out within the community and it shaped the strategies the political parties used to try and reach voters. The obvious things are no shaking hands, no kissing babies and that sort of thing. We saw people standing on street corners waving signs rather than going and talking directly to voters.

An extension of that is the way voters consumed the messages of the political parties in this campaign was different to what we had seen before. I think it hastened the shift away from old media in terms of its influence and usefulness as a medium of those political messages. I completely agree with John's point about the *Courier-Mail*. I think they misread the mood of the community substantially from the moment they started to air those quite bitter kinds of attacks on the Premier on the eve of the election campaign around her management of the coronavirus. The other thing coronavirus did was redefine the underlying importance of the election in the eyes of voters and the importance of government, the fact that government—and state government—was suddenly far more important to individuals than it had been previously. Statewide there was a combined six per cent swing to the two major parties. That can largely be explained in terms of a large vote going away from One Nation, but I think it is also reflective of the fact that we had an election where voters wanted to have a very direct say in the way this state is run one way or the other rather than register something that might be a disaffected or a protest vote.

To drill into the way coronavirus shaped the strategy and campaigning elements, particularly from Labor, I think there are strategies they used during the campaign that were probably forced on them by the nature of the coronavirus campaign but that I think are going to have some sort of longevity and be built upon in future campaigns. Campaigns are not necessarily just a contest of ideas but also a contest to see who can shape and determine the agenda. That has typically played out in terms of who can get their story of the day on the campaign trail in front of the editor of the *Courier-Mail*. They might go big on what the LNP said for one day. It is about winning the day, about winning the week, about winning the contest of the campaign. In this election voters largely determined prior to the campaign beginning what they wanted from politicians at the very outset. We had this kind of structured campaign with this contest of, 'How do we get our ideas on the agenda?'

From an LNP perspective, as Sarah was saying, there are issues they want to be talking about at an election like the economy and law and order. From Labor's perspective, they wanted to play into the things that get people to vote Labor, which are things like health and education. We did not necessarily see that sort of a strategic contest. We saw a contest where simply the political parties were really trying to hit the points of what voters wanted which, as Labor did very successfully, was strength and stability in the middle of a pandemic.

On the back of the pandemic, Annastacia Palaszczuk built a platform on social media where she was able to speak directly to a phenomenal number of people. Her social media reach increased 400 per cent compared to the previous year, because she was holding pandemic press conferences day after day. This is the critical information to people, people who might not necessarily have been engaged with election campaigns. She is there telling them the latest numbers, the latest restrictions, the latest on the border situation. People were consuming that directly from her, directly from social media. They are not necessarily getting these messages from media outlets as they might have previously. They built her this ability to speak more directly to people. To a large extent, that did disrupt the campaign. It also shaped the way the media ended up having to cover the campaign.

Allow me a brief indulgence to talk about the *Guardian* and what we did during the campaign. The *Guardian* in Queensland is me, right? This is not a massive operation where we have the ability to follow the political buses around and be at every political press conference, but we did attempt to start to drill into things that we know are important to the people who read the *Guardian*. We looked at the jobs promises. Were we offering the right jobs? What sort of jobs provide a proper economic return? Is it right to be standing around in high-vis all the time? Is that the thing that we need? Are we providing enough jobs for women when we know that women are the people hardest hit by the pandemic? What of the hysteria around law and order in North Queensland, particularly in Townsville? What is the reality of that sort of stuff? That is where we tried to add some level of value rather than that kind of give and take.

There is a broader point that all media outlets need to take from this election, particularly the *Courier-Mail*. I worked at the *Courier-Mail* during the 2017 election. This time around, there was a new level in terms of the direction of its coverage, how pointedly it campaigned against the Labor Party effectively, how it ran arguments about the borders, et cetera. At the end of it, the election result partly speaks to the

fact that media outlets need to realise that perhaps they are not necessarily in touch with a broader readership. If some of these themes from the COVID campaign continue, we all will have to start to think about how we cover elections and how we are best serving our readers in terms of what we cover.

The contrast to Palaszczuk's and Labor's very social media, very presidential-type campaign was Deb Frecklington who at the very outset faced an inability to control the agenda because of the way coronavirus had dictated that. There was a deficit in her ability to connect directly with people compared to Labor and the Premier because of the essential direct contact that they had built. There was even a real inability to directly attack her opponent. At the very outset of the campaign we did see from the LNP a strategy where these federal surrogates—Morrison, Cormann and a few others—came in and were very strong. They were very strong, very pointed and very personal attacks that were then picked up pretty extensively in the local media, but those were dropped in an instant. They did not continue through the campaign. More than anything, that should tell you that they did not land in the eyes of members of the community. I do not have the data to back that up. I only know what people from each political party are telling me about that, but the attacks essentially disappeared very quickly.

The issue that Frecklington had, in an attempt essentially to catch up or change the agenda, was that the sorts of strategies that political parties use to change the agenda may not necessarily have been ones that work in a COVID election. People watch Netflix rather than the evening news or whatever is on Channel 9 or Channel 7 of an evening. That limits the ability for political advertising on television to have cut through. People are scrolling Facebook rather than reading the newspaper and there then is a limited ability to run a campaign line through the press.

It then could be quite easy to determine that coronavirus ended the campaign before it began. I certainly have great sympathy for the LNP campaign team in terms of trying to come up with a strategy that worked and broke through that. Obviously, there are nuances. More than anything, one of the things we talked about right at the outset and throughout the campaign was the notion that essentially we were seeing two election campaigns. We were seeing messaging very different in the south-east of Queensland compared to Central and North Queensland. I do not think that was borne out in the election result. This is our partly misreading what was happening, but there was kind of a dictation in terms of COVID. COVID possibly was a bigger issue, particularly outside the south-east, than we thought it would be at the outset.

What of the contradictions in policy which were exposed and which both the LNP and Labor have? Graham talked about the fact that people view the LNP perhaps more as a Liberal Party than a National Party. At the same time you look and say that they have four seats in Greater Brisbane. Notionally, that is where you would expect a Liberal Party to be doing well. They do not seem to have been able to do as well as Labor in terms of managing this kind of 'both sides of the street' strategy where, particularly around issues like coal and climate, you do need to be able to say different things in different parts of the state to have a successful political strategy.

We also only need to look at the petulant response from a number of people within Labor towards the success of the Greens in probably half a dozen seats where they poll very well—they won two—and to the fact that the Greens dared put up candidates and people dared vote for them. As a result, we need perhaps to understand that Labor is worried about whether it is able to win back that inner city vote and the support from inner city people. At the same time, they also have to run a defensive line in places like Townsville and in those regional cities right up the coast. It is a very difficult job to frame a state-wide, election-winning campaign in Queensland. By virtue of having lost, though, the LNP is the party that has to undergo the reckoning.

Labor perhaps has policy contradictions and issues that it would have had to deal with had it lost, but the LNP will probably go through a much more difficult process now if it actually wants to right some of the issues within the party. Clearly, there are party divisions. The merger created a very broad church. People in the party like to use that term, but there are people who have very different political and social views sitting alongside one another in the party room. The party is currently starting a broad review not just of its election campaign, but of the party. The first question they asked members of the state executive was, 'What is our *raison d'être*? What is the purpose of the Liberal-National Party?' If you are starting a campaign from the point of view of not knowing that, there is a huge problem.

Again, the fact that it holds only four seats in the capital, a place it completely dominates at council level, shows that it does not just have problems breaking through a kind of Katter dominance in North Queensland or a One Nation vote in Central Queensland but that it also has problems pitching a state-wide party in Greater Brisbane. The reconstruction process here is: how do you engage Toowong and Townsville
Brisbane

voters at the same time? There is certainly no easy answer to that. The way that Labor managed that through the campaign was Palaszczuk. There is simply one answer to that—they were able to hide policy contradictions and perhaps thin policies behind the fact that they had a very popular Premier. They built a campaign around her. Palaszczuk appealed to people in those sorts of areas where the priorities of voters were quite disparate.

We tend to look at elections to resolve policy disputes or heated policy debates. Governments will say, 'This is our position, this is what we are seeking a mandate for.' Subsequent to that, they go and implement policies on that basis. Because of the nature of the campaign and because of the nature of Labor's pitch—which was quite vague in a lot of areas with regard to policy—in my view we probably have more contention about hotly debated policy areas in this state than we did prior to the election. The climate debate is not going away. The debate about how we transition away from a coal industry that is currently suffering some pretty alarming life signs is not going away. The Greens are not going away in inner Brisbane. The Katters are not going away in North Queensland. Having won this election and a third term, but with a mandate that is essentially vague, it will be really interesting to see how the government sets about managing a crisis that will be long gone by the time we get to the next election.

Whether Labor is able to be brave and is not held back by the weight of having promised not to do something and whether it seeks to address some of these longstanding policy issues in the state remains to be seen. What I think we have seen from Labor since 2015, particularly from Palaszczuk, is a very cautious, very careful government, one that is often accused of being a do-nothing government. Will it attempt to continue another four years of steady as she goes? I think there are some real political risks in doing that but, having said that, there are obviously similar political risks in attempting to wade into some of these third rail policy debates that politicians have been and were definitely during this campaign too scared to really pitch their tent on one side of or another. That is pretty much my conclusion, thank you.

Mr FRASER: Thank you very much, Ben. We will now open up to questions.

Mr MOLLS: Thank you all for your great presentations. My question is about micro targeting and data-driven campaigning. Is this something that we should worry about? Is that a reality, or is this just some talk that goes around the political parties?

Mr YOUNG: I am happy to talk about it. I think I might be a pioneer in that area, because back in 1989 when I had my first tilt at state parliament we were trying to market a target. The reality is smaller than the conception. When you are talking about writing letters to people, or then emails, it used to depend on keeping good data about who those people are or might be, but you can only know so much about people. The records are only as good as the people keeping them. There is some benefit there but there is a benefit in the person receiving the communication as well, because there is no point in talking to people who are not interested in what you are saying.

If there is a sinister element it is that you might be trying to say one thing to one group and another thing to another group, but if you do that in an email it is very easy for the one person that you had in your database who you thought was on side but is not to flick it on to a whole lot of mates and you have a problem. That has probably broadened out a bit now because you have Facebook and various other social media platforms that have data on you, but I suspect they have more data than they can in reality use. Again it is a trade-off between targeting messages to people they might be interested in and trying to get different messages to different groups. I think Ben was talking about talking to people in North Queensland—if I am misrepresenting you, let me know—in one way and south Queensland in another. It does not work too well on social media because it is very easy for that to be flicked around and for people to get on to it, so I do not think it is something you really need to worry about.

Ms HARRIS RIMMER: I have a question for Sarah about gender division in terms of party preference. What do you think is driving it? Is it a representation issue? Is it a policy issue? Did you get any deeper into that particular data?

Dr CAMERON: I have not delved into that. Other studies have and there have been studies from other countries as well. There have been a few factors that have gone into this. On the one hand, obviously the world has changed a lot over the last few decades. More women are in the labour force than ever before. Women have higher levels of education and we find more educated voters do tend to vote for parties on the left, so that is a factor. Another factor could be changes in the parties over time. With the Labor Party in particular, it is perhaps most targeted at working class voters and also progressive issues such as climate and social issues, so I think there are a few dynamics that are fitting into that, both changes in terms of gender differences in the population and also changes in the parties themselves.

Mr MCARDLE: Graham, I am interested in your comments in relation to Mansfield and Aspley and how that applies to Nicklin and Bundaberg. Bundaberg and Nicklin were both first-term members. Can you correlate that to Hervey Bay—Ted Sorensen was a long-term member and mayor—and myself? How do you link the comments you made about Mansfield and Aspley, with third-term members, going to (inaudible) but in Nicklin and Bundaberg first-term members were both turfed out?

Mr YOUNG: It does not invalidate my analysis of Mansfield and Aspley because it raises the question as to what was going on in Nicklin and Bundaberg that that happened. You are closer to that than I am. I am not the font of all wisdom. Something happened there. You had a general move to the ALP, so that would have played in Aspley and Mansfield. What were the swings in Aspley and Mansfield, John? I think it was sort of three and five per cent, weren't they? I do not think the swings were quite as high in Nicklin and Bundaberg. I guess the first member mitigated the swing that was going on, but there was a swing going on anyway.

Nicklin is interesting because Peter Wellington was there for about three terms and he was an Independent. They are bolshie, there is a bit of a hillbilly left-wing element. I think Maleny is in Nicklin. My polls are not perfectly spread around the country, but I get this little cluster in Maleny or around the 45 something postcode. They tend to be anti-vaxxers, they tend to be very worried about climate change, so you have those sorts of things happening in Nicklin. I am not sure about Bundaberg. I would have thought that with the Paradise Dam you guys should have been on a winner there. It could have been the candidate.

Mr MICKEL: No, the Libs got on the wrong side of the Paradise Dam debate.

Mr YOUNG: Did they?

Mr MICKEL: Yes, absolutely.

Mr YOUNG: That is what I just said: they should have been on a winner.

Mr MICKEL: No, they backed the farmer and not the town. That was the difference.

Mr YOUNG: You think the town was worried that the dam was going to burst and flood them?

Mr MICKEL: Absolutely, because that is what happened in 2011. That is what the levee thing was all about. The candidate—the member there knew it because he was the copper who had to go to the house in 2011, and quietly he was aghast at the policy. Labor had an indifferent member who lost in 2017, and then One Nation voters went against her anyway when that went away. It is tough to know when you only win by nine votes, but I always felt the Libs got on the wrong side of the Paradise Dam debate. It was a thing for the farmers but not for the townies.

Mr PENFOLD: My question is for Dr Cameron. The other three speakers all mentioned the disparity between how Labor and the Libs perform at a federal level and the state level. It strikes me that if you have one party that is generally fairly low taxing and a bit stingy on services and there is another one that is high taxing and quite generous with services, and if you have a situation where the federal government taxes more than it spends and a state government that spends more than it taxes because of the vertical fiscal imbalance that we have in Australia, that a cynical electorate might decide to have their cake and eat it too; essentially, to vote for low-taxing federal governments and high-service state governments. Is that borne out in your research at all, do you think?

Dr CAMERON: That is an interesting and insightful question. I am not sure. The level of sophistication in your question probably is not reflected in voters' opinions and how they are making their decisions in elections. One factor playing into both state and federal elections at the moment is the benefit of incumbency. Labor benefitted from being incumbents in this year's Queensland election and also being seen to have handled the COVID crisis well. It is a while until the next federal election so we may see that at the federal level as well, at least with the current trend in terms of approval of incumbents. I think that is a really interesting theory that you raised and we could test it, but I have not tested that question.

Mr FRASER: I would like to thank our four speakers tonight. It has been an interesting discussion. A number of interesting points were raised. I am glad Graham and John had a verbal punch-up of some degree. I would also like to thank all our guests for coming. It was great to get back into the swing of things again. We have missed each other for so long but we will get used to each other again. We would like to present our presenters with our usual fine wine. You can always guarantee to get a drink in Parliament House in Queensland.

There is one item I need to deal with. Frank Mols was unable to be at our AGM in September and therefore missed out on his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be elected to our executive, so I said we will just move a motion at the end of tonight's gathering. I move that Frank Mols be retained as a member of our ASPG executive. Could I have a seconder, please? Nonie. All those in favour? Thank you very much. Carried.

There will be wine and refreshments at the back there. I ask those of you who are not members of ASPG to consider joining with us. We hope to resume our normal pattern of activities next year. There are forms available down the back there. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.