



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

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2018

Brisbane

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Mr FRASER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the ASPG Queensland chapter's September function. This organisation has always tried to take various themes and explore them both, in a certain sense, in an historical perspective and then in a more contemporary way. We thought this month we would try to look at the role and challenges that women in state politics have faced, say, over the past 30 or 40 years. We decided to approach this by looking at it from the perspective of two current women politicians and compare that with the experiences of a former female politician. We thought we would compare the 21st century with the 20th century—not looking at a gap of 100 years but looking at a gap of roughly 30 years—and see how the experiences and the challenges have changed.

On behalf of the ASPG, I would like to welcome you all tonight. Our three speakers tonight are from the current parliament. The member for Currumbin, Jann Stuckey, was elected in 2004 and is a member, as I am sure you would all appreciate, of the LNP. She served as a minister in the Campbell Newman government and is probably one of the, I would say—

Mrs STUCKEY: Careful with these words—

Mr FRASER: It will be right. Jann is probably one of the most significant contributors over a period of time to the parliament.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. I thought you were going to talk about age.

Mr FRASER: Our second speaker is not as long a serving member but, hopefully, in the long term is as distinguished and she is the member for Lytton, Joan Pease. Joan was elected in 2015 as the member for Lytton. She had a career based significantly in training. Joan has a long history in the ALP and, of our three speakers tonight, is the most recently elected, so she will probably bring a good perspective as well to the question.

To round off the triumvirate, we have Beryce Nelson. Beryce was elected in 1980 as the Liberal member for Aspley. She served as a minister in the National Party government in the closing years of that decade. We have asked Beryce to essentially, after listening to the contributions of our two current members, give her perspective on how things have changed since she was first elected nearly 40 years ago. Beryce was one of a growing number of women at the time, but my perception at the time was that women were still a wee bit unusual so they still stood out, whereas maybe now women members do not stand out as much.

I will invite Joan to speak first. We will then hear from Jann. Then we will let Beryce give her perspective and then we will open it up to questions. When question time begins, there is a roving mike. Because this is all being recorded by Hansard, if you could announce your name and if you represent any particular organisation, that would be appreciated so that Hansard can get an accurate record.

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much, David. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge David and my fellow parliamentary colleagues. It is great to see so many of you here. I would particularly like to acknowledge Cynthia Lui, who is our first Torres Strait Islander representative elected to the Queensland parliament as both a Torres Strait Islander and a female. So welcome. Thank you for joining us tonight. It is great to see collectively the huge number of years that we have among us as members of parliament here tonight. Thank you for joining us all.

I am a bit of a latecomer here tonight. I am only filling in because Brittany was unable to attend, so bear with me, if you do not mind, please. I was recently at a function where Kristina Keneally, who was the first female premier of New South Wales and is also a current senator for New South Wales, was talking about the challenges that she faced as a woman in politics. A friend at the function commented on the irony that the room was full of young men. She pointed out the wall of young blokes sitting in front of us. 'Where are all the women?' she wanted to know. An easy assumption might be to make one that is based on gender roles and responsibilities: the women could not make it to this function because, despite what we

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all like to believe, women still share a disproportionate load of family responsibilities and, as such, it breaks my heart to say so, women are still more likely to shoulder a bigger responsibility for household tasks and child care thus eliminating them from attendance at a function such as the one we were at.

Perhaps that was too easy a conclusion to draw. In thinking a little bit more about why women are underrepresented, it struck me that the majority of males present were all employed, or hoping to be employed, in some capacity in political positions—chiefs of staff, advisers, ministerial staffers, assistants and the like. The young women were not excluded from this event because of family roles and responsibilities; they were not even part of the team in the first place. We all know that this team of political advisers is a pool of talent that often acts as an incubator for political careers. If women are underrepresented at this level, what hope do we have of ever being recruited as a political candidate? Political appointments are made from within our own networks. Staff are recruited from those whose names come immediately to mind and it is often men who are making the decisions surrounded by male dominated networks and from these networks they anoint and appoint with the result that men's informal networks can circumvent the formal equality work that women do. As a result, the public face of politics is still overwhelmingly male.

I think the media plays an important role in perpetrating this, too. The media often sends a strong message to women that, 'This is not a game for you' and I am sure you would all agree that recent events in Canberra would reinforce that message. The news media and political programs feature men talking to men about men. Women are the focus of only 10 per cent of news stories and they comprise just 20 of all experts or spokespeople interviewed. Only four per cent of news stories we see are challenging gender roles. What we see on-screen affects what happens off-screen. Who we see in power influences how we see ourselves. Politics is portrayed by the media as a man's game. Fortunately, in Queensland, we are breaking this model and currently have a significant female representation in government, with both a female Premier and Deputy Premier and cabinet is made up of half female representation.

I also think that women's own self-perception and self-doubt plays a role. Women who may, in fact, be well suited to run for office or party political positions do not know that they can and may believe that they are not as well qualified and are often not supported or encouraged to consider these roles by their male colleagues. Sadly, there remains a perception that, if a woman runs for office, they will not do as well as men, they will not raise as much money, or get as much media coverage as men. However, there is no evidence to support that belief.

Women who are well known in the electorate and who are tireless community workers are less likely to be offered a safe seat as they are often not part of the hierarchy and, therefore, not considered or rewarded for their efforts. Women in preselection tussles can be quizzed about their fertility plans if they are of child-bearing age or are mothers. They can be expected to justify how they will continue to parent their children while doing their job. In fact, in my own preselection context my opponent was pregnant at the time and she was questioned about her capacity to run a campaign—a disgrace. That was certainly not by me or my friends who were supporting me and I was very scornful of those who raised this issue.

There is a double standard for mothers and fathers in politics. I know that you would all be aware that currently we have a number of young parents in parliament with young children, both male and female. How do we redress this? In my case in my party we have affirmative action, and this is part of the strategy. We need to have women represented at every level of political life to ensure real representation and inclusiveness. Women need to have power and exert influence behind the scenes as well. We need women in positions influencing policy and decision making. Fortunately, in the Labor Party in the state of Queensland currently the state and assistant state secretary are women. We need to plant the seed early in girls' lives that a political career, including running for office if she so desires, is something that a woman can consider doing.

I like to think that that is what I am doing in my electorate. I am developing a strategy for high schools where we can educate students about the political process and how we can be actively part of that, and I see that as an important step in getting girls involved in politics from the get-go. I am the current Queensland representative of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and next week, in fact, I am hosting a second in the series of Smash the Ceiling events called Speaking to be Heard and I have invited the current and past young women from the Youth Parliament program and also the Indigenous parliament program.

I am a dedicated community worker and I believe that through my community engagement I exemplify what I and my party stand for—social justice, opportunity and prosperity for all and supporting those in need. The community sees me not only fight for but also implement those ideals at a local level and on the

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way I am identifying like-minded businesswomen, employees and community workers and encouraging them to get on board and participate in community leadership roles, to put their skills and experience and voices to work so that they can help define the kind of life we want for our community and our future.

I did not become the candidate to Lytton or the member for Lytton through the usual political pipeline. I had been involved in the party for many years and, like other branchies, particularly women, I did not imagine that I would run or win an election. However, an opportunity was presented—and one which would not have been offered to me normally—but I ran in a successful preselection campaign in late 2014 and was elected in 2015.

I am loyal to my party, I am loyal to my local community and loyal to my values. I am loyal to the memory of my parents, who fiercely encouraged their three daughters to participate in community and to stand up for what is right and just. I am going to continue talking politics to a diversity of women and girls in my electorate. I am going to continue telling them that there are different ways to engage in political life and I am going to emphasise my story: be genuine, be loyal, always fight for your values and, should you seek political office, do not let anyone tell you no. Thank you.

Mr FRASER: Thanks very much, Joan. I will now call on Jann Stuckey.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you so much, David. I would like to acknowledge Beryce here today. It is wonderful to see that other generation, and I think David was very kind actually because I was sure he was going to call me a veteran or something like that. But he chose his words very carefully, so thank you, and I do not mind if they call me 'a veteran'; as long as you do not call me 'an old boiler', because that has other connotations, doesn't it?

It is interesting that I have been asked to speak second, Joan, because I have always been the middle child. I know this is being transcribed by Hansard so I have to be a little bit careful, but when you are the middle child when you go to bathrooms and things that are public you take the middle toilet. You do not take the first one, you do not take the last one; you just take the middle everything. You get hand-me-downs and all those things. I was determined to be a little bit different. What was interesting being the middle of three girls was that we really did not know what boys were like. Mind you, I discovered that in my teens! But we did not know what boys were like because we did not have any brothers, so we did not know that we were supposedly disadvantaged. So, therefore, we all achieved in our own way. Typical of those days though, my older sister went into teaching, I went into nursing and the little one was a secretary, so we sort of covered those 'typical' female jobs back then.

I stand before you as someone who has run in seven elections. I won six. I lost that first one, and do you know what? I got the recipe right after that, and that recipe is very much about being a part of the community that you live in. It means that you immerse yourself in that community and you love it with every single sinew in your body, and I think women do that extremely well. I am not saying that men cannot have those connections with their community, but I think it is women who tend to have that eye for the detail and do those smaller things because, after all, that was a role that perhaps was embedded in the generations that came before us.

I was thinking about my consideration before going into a preselection. I won the seat of Currumbin back in 2004. When I ran in 2001 a fairly longstanding Labor female had been in that seat for a long time. It was probably not even on my radar then, but—again, I am very aware of Hansard transcribing this—I got into politics on a dare. I have been married 41 years now to the most amazing man and he actually tossed the newspaper at me one morning in bed. I had been talking about politics for a long time. I had been saying that I wanted to contribute. I had had a very high activity in community organisations. In Adelaide I became the president of the very first child-care centre to integrate children with disabilities with those who were without disability and it was a very proud couple of years.

I remember when we moved up here I moved a house and turned it into a community centre. I do not think Education Queensland had ever seen anything like that, but I guess I just did not believe things could not be done. I collected books and set up a library in a village school in Fiji too. These ideas are wonderful until you realise some of the logistics, but if you actually believe you can do things then you worry about how to after because you just get on and do it. That morning my husband just threw the newspaper on the bed and said, 'Hey, babe, it's put up or shut up time.' I thought the worst, didn't I? I am being very frank here, but he said, 'No, the seat of McPherson is about to be vacated.' I said, 'But that's a federal seat.'

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He said, 'Oh, so all of this talk all these years about being this voice for people was nonsense?' Now, I am a woman of my word, and he was keen. He said, 'Okay, I'll pay for your preselection nomination fee.' So I thought, 'Look, I'll do it. It will shut him up. I'll do it.'

That was a preselection with 26 candidates in it. Former mayor Sallyanne Atkinson was in it, a lot of councillors and little old Jann, who virtually did not realise you probably needed your numbers before you went in for something like that. I was candidate No. 17. It was an 8 am till 8 pm preselection and I remember my husband saying, 'Look, they came in to take the first names off the board who were unsuccessful.' He said, 'I put my hand over my eyes and eight went and you were still there!' I went out fairly soon after that. I did that because I was a woman of my word and also it gave me a baptism into the world of politics and it made me realise that federal politics was not for me, but state politics was where I really, really felt I could make my mark and I could contribute to people, and so state politics it became.

No-one challenged me at the preselection. No-one thought we could win! As my colleague alluded to, sometimes women do not get tapped on the shoulder for a seat that you think is going to be an absolute cracker. They will give you one that is going to be pretty tough to win. So nobody challenged me and I was out there for 14 months day in and day out before that election. That was a three per cent seat when we went in. We lost and came out with a 14.5 per cent seat in Merri Rose's favour. I was a little bit crushed thinking that it was me and I must have body odour or something like that, but I decided I really wanted to represent Currumbin because it is where my husband's medical practice was, it is where we lived, it is where I felt was my home.

So I put my hand up to run against a 14.5 per cent margin, and I was out there all up from the first start for nearly five years—five years investing in my community so that I could earn the right to be the member for Currumbin. In 2004 we did a 17.7 per cent swing and I became the member for Currumbin, and I have been very proud to represent there since. I think the expectation after that though—apart from the fact I was absolutely exhausted—was that I then became only the fifth ever Liberal woman to enter the Queensland parliament, and I will remain the fifth ever Liberal woman because we formed the LNP. I did not perhaps understand the significance of that until I looked back on the past of Irene Longman and people like yourself, Beryce, to realise the significance of it. Of course, since then we have seen a lot more women, particularly in the government, come into politics.

For my sins of winning we were not even in a coalition, so I got five portfolios straightaway as the shadow Liberal spokesperson. I remember speaking to Bob Quinn and saying, 'You mean I have to speak on every bill that comes in the House?' He just said, 'You wanted this, so get on with it.' Politics is a tough gig and, yes, I got on with it. I have had many portfolios. I have met some amazing people in organisations. When we have not been able to perhaps get the outcome or result we wanted, I am very proud if we can get some amendments and we can get some change because of that sort of debate.

My expectations were really just to win the seat and I did not think past that, but I guess you could say I have done that full circle now. Having spent most of my career in opposition is not the favourite thing to do, but you certainly, as I said, can have some of those small wins along the way. Importantly, in that robust chamber where names are hurled across the chamber you hope that that is left in there when you come outside. You really have to understand that you are there to represent your community. You are there to carry their voice and the name-calling and personal attacks really are to me a product of what we have today in society in general.

With other changes such as social media and technology—Joan has touched on that, too—you have to just be all things to all people in so many ways now and everybody has the best advice on whether you should be texting, doorknocking or whatever. I find physical contact still absolutely the best. If I can meet people, then I feel that I am engaging at a level that you really cannot beat, so that will always be my favourite.

When you are talking about those differences, too, and the roadblocks faced by females, I was saying to Joan, who has just had her knee op and I have a back problem at the moment, that it is the dress code! You try and teeter around in heels if you are a fellow and see how you go! The face goes on and what you wear. Actually, I remember Joan Sheldon saying to me, 'You know, I'm so sick of them asking me what earrings I'm wearing or saying my earrings were bobbing on TV when they should be asking me about policy and what I think.' As women we cannot really have it both ways because we often take pride in our appearance, but I do think that we should bring sneakers into the green chamber!

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On that note, having been in here 14 years, I think that politics has become too personal. I do feel that you need a tough skin, but most of all you need to be able to believe in yourself and you do not need a heap of other people to believe in you. You just need a couple. That is all you need, because if you listened to everybody who is in your sphere you are going to be pulled in so many different directions and really exhausted.

I love my life and I love where I live. I am very loyal to my party and what it stands for. I could not have had the experiences that I have had if I had not been the member for Currumbin, if I had not had time on the frontbench—even in opposition—and if I had not had the absolute honour of being a minister. Thank you for letting me share a little bit of that today. I really hope that some of you in this room will consider your career in one of the toughest but most rewarding that you could possibly have. Thank you.

Mr FRASER: Thanks very much, Jann. Now to give the perspective from the 20th century, Beryce Nelson.

Ms NELSON: Firstly, I give many thanks to Jann and Joan for telling us about life in politics and parliament as a woman MP. Their hard work has been vindicated by their success in the electorate and in more senior roles in government. I did some research on Brittany. I know Brittany. Joan, I have not had a chance to do the research on you, but I will now. They are working in a political and social environment that is very different from the one that I entered in the 1970s, but one that is now much harder to navigate because of new technologies and the loss of trust in the world of politics across the globe.

It was a very different world in the 1970s. Anything seemed possible when we humans stepped on to the moon. More and more women were attending university than ever before and the women's movement in the Western World was developing a momentum of its own. But it was a much more ordered, structured and conservative world and one in which women played mostly a secondary role in the worlds of business, the professions and, most of all, politics.

It was during that time of great change that I was invited to nominate for the seat of Aspley—a safe seat, girls—when the sitting member announced his retirement. There were 13 candidates—not 26, you poor soul—for such a safe seat and only one of them was female. It took almost all day. Since I had been a delegate on past preselection councils, I took along my embroidery to help pass the time in the waiting room. The effect on the other candidates was electric. The effect on them was just hilarious. One of the men who was watching me for so long finally said, 'I wish I'd brought along a pack of cards' and I said, 'I wish you had too,' because I loved playing cards. Seriously, it was so stressful and exhausting. Anyway, I was very lucky, because I won on the second ballot. This was the result of great help from two very bright young men, who David would probably remember, who worked with me on my speech but mainly—mainly—because I had personally visited every delegate. It seemed that no-one else had bothered to do that.

My endorsement as a candidate for a safe seat in parliament was viewed with some dismay by mostly the older male powerbrokers in the party of the day, but they very quickly rallied behind me, especially when a strong campaign was established by an opposing party to try to defeat me. Their tactics were also hilarious. Apparently, I had a baby hidden in the back bedroom. This was news to me, but they tried very hard to convince the local community, but they all knew me because I had been working in the community. They all knew that I did not have a baby stuck in the back bedroom, but they did know that I had three children and that they were school age and that one was severely disabled. However, I was able to fend them off by just not allowing that to influence me.

I became the first married woman with children of school age to be elected to a state parliament in Australia. There had been one other woman elected to a federal House—and I think that was probably about 45 years ago prior to that—so there really were not a lot of women with children in any of the parliaments. They were mostly single women, if there were any at all, and there only were handful across Australia.

It was a daunting prospect but, like both of the ladies who have just spoken, it was also exciting and challenging. I was there with a mission. I was raised by a widow. I was not a middle child. I had a sister. My mother was widowed when I was very young and, like you and your sisters, I was never raised to think that I could not do anything. Quite the contrary, my mother was quite an entrepreneur, as was her mother. My grandmother ran a business in Mount Morgan while working for the goldmine and set up a shop in

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competition to the mining company shop because she did not think that people should have to buy from it, and she succeeded. Just in her spare time, she ran a turkey farm at Emu Park as well. Think about that. We are talking about the very early 20th century.

When I walked through the doors of the Parliamentary Annexe to attend a sort of rudimentary introduction to the processes of the Queensland parliament, I was met at the door by the honourable Tom Burns, who was then leader of the opposition. He was heading out. He welcomed me very warmly with a firm handshake and said, 'Welcome to wonderland in Alice Street.' It was one of his favourites, I think. Anyway, it was great for me, because I was a fan of Lewis Carroll, so we had a little chat.

The second most memorable moment occurred a few days later when I attended my first party meeting and made the terrible mistake of speaking. I spoke on a matter that was expected to automatically go forward to cabinet and get support. It did not proceed. As we left the room later, one senior minister held the door open for me and said very quietly, 'Welcome to the jungle. I don't think you'll be swinging from the lower branches for very long.' I was not quite sure whether he meant it as a compliment or an insult.

It was not all fun and games. Being one of two women in the Legislative Assembly—I was the fourth and you were the fifth; is that not amazing and I was elected in 1980. Let us not go there—placed a great burden on our shoulders. We were expected to be authorities on all things relating to the needs of women, but we were not expected to have any opinions, let alone general knowledge or expertise on any other major issues of the day. My special area at the time was health. The media of the day took a fairly similar view—nothing has changed there—so I avoided them where possible and kept my contact with the electorate through regular meetings with individuals and groups, a quarterly newsletter and stories for the local newspaper. ABC Radio was also good value, because it took a more intelligent and less hostile approach to the broader role of women in parliament.

From my decade and more of experience in politics as a volunteer and policy committee member and from university studies, I had a clear view of my role. I did not see myself as a female MP, just as the representative of the people in my electorate and that my job was, first and foremost, to represent all of them equally. Secondly, my job was to understand the broader issues affecting the state. Thirdly, my job was to represent the party that had endorsed me. I put have that third tonight deliberately.

I was not a member of a cult; I was a member of a political party that respected my opinion. In those days, you could vote according to your conscience and I crossed the floor twice. Mind you, we had a majority. You could not fall over. I did that with not so much permission but letting the Speaker and letting the party leader and all of those people know that I held strong views on that subject and intended to cross the floor. These days, that seems to be a hanging offence. My final job was to recognise that it was a three-year contract and not a job for life. I am sure that keeping the balance right in those four things is just as difficult today as it was then.

There is one thing that stands out for me from that time. All of the male MPs and senior bureaucrats whom I worked with treated me with respect. They were always courteous and helpful. Given some recent publicity at national and state level, it seems that those standards do not necessarily apply in today's society and certainly not in the world of modern politics. This is very disappointing to me and is the main reason that many men and women do not want to get involved in politics at all. That is a real risk for the future of parliamentary democracies everywhere.

However, very occasionally an opposition member would have a go at me on a political point, but always came up later to say, 'Do you want a coffee?' and we would go to the canteen and have a coffee and we became friends. In fact, I became really good friends with Henry Palaszczuk that way. He was there when I was there. We are still friends. I often said, 'Yes' and made many friends. However, when I interjected late one night to defend a colleague who was being ridiculed about his weight one MP said, 'If you were a man I'd take you outside' and I replied that if he were a man I would go. That made page 1 of the *Courier-Mail*, so I was very careful about what I said in interjections after that. I will not tell you who it was.

Being in government is always much easier for an MP than being in opposition. I was fortunate enough to be in a position to get a lot done in my electorate, which had experienced substantial population growth but the expansion of infrastructure and service delivery had not kept pace. I also worked to achieve major reforms in the area of disability services. A group of us were elected by various parties because we

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had established the Downs Syndrome Association in Queensland in the 1970s and then helped set it up in other states in Australia. A few of us got elected because we got involved more actively and we were speaking out. I think that is why we were noticed. That was men and women.

I wanted better justice for victims of violent crime, because that was a major issue at the time—and nothing has changed there—particularly against women. You will probably note that there has been more than one domestic violence murder in this country every five days since the year started, but is anyone doing anything about it at a serious level in terms of what we need to do to change that? It is worse than it was—much worse than it was—some decades ago.

I particularly wanted to preserve some of the historic sites in Brisbane and elsewhere outside of Brisbane. I was able to do those things and it was just amazing. There are some great stories. I supported the work of the Moreton Island protection committee. You were all probably not born when that was on. Moreton Island was going to be mined. A group of us were absolutely determined that it was not going to be mined. When we have question time, if someone wants to ask me, I will tell you the hilarious story about how we stopped it. The other thing was working with councillor David Hinchliffe, who is a good friend, and the Queensland tourism minister—different parties—to save Customs House, the Naval Stores, the New Farm Powerhouse, the Tennyson Power Station, which did get eventually knocked down, and other riverside landmarks. That still gives me great joy to this day. There is another great story about how that happened as well.

The introduction of community service orders as part of youth justice in lieu of custodial sentences, which were an absolutely failing young people, helped to change the lives of many young people. I am most impressed with the work that is currently being done by the Hon. Di Farmer in this area. The expansion of Prince Charles Hospital, which was in the electorate, and the development of a children's cardiac unit there were a couple of the most vital infrastructure projects in the electorate.

MPs, male and female, can tell you all their stories about their achievements in their electorate, but it was my experience—and it still is—that female MPs go the extra mile to ensure that things get done, which is why they turn marginal seats into safe seats. We need more women in our parliaments. Too right we do. It is great to see so many in the Queensland cabinet and the Queensland parliament now—only Canada's federal government, I believe, has more—and particularly also to see a Premier and Leader of the Opposition both as women. May we see more women play a vital role in politics in Australia. Thank you.

Mr FRASER: Thanks very much, Beryce. We have dedicated roughly 20 minutes for questions. If it appears that you are all massively enthusiastic and wish to continue, we will cut into our drinking time. We will have a roving microphone, so signify your interest in asking a question. Before you ask a question, could you indicate your name for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms Henderson: My name is Amy Henderson and I am the President of the National Council of Women of Queensland. We have just started the inaugural National Council of Young Women of Queensland. We are seeing a lot of women's groups having to fold. Yes, you are nodding your heads. The Country Women's Association has just been in the media. Because there are a lot more women's organisations and some are crossing over in different areas, I am curious as to your advice on how they should move forward.

Mrs STUCKEY: I think you should take your knitting or crocheting along. I hear what you are saying. We have a CWA right on the border of New South Wales and Queensland, which is in my electorate. I think they need to reinvent themselves to a degree, without losing their core philosophies and *raison d'être*; their reason for being. We have all had to adapt and modernise and respond to technology. I think they need to, as well.

So often with these meetings, no matter what they are—whether they are Rotary, Lions, political parties—if you keep doing the same old thing in the same old place at the same old time, people get a little bored unless you actually have some new faces and things happening. Go on the road. I am a great believer in going to different places, not so that you are popping up in a different venue every time, but think about ways to raise that profile and to reinvigate, refresh and renew.

Ms PEASE: Across the whole sector, volunteer organisations are dwindling because we are all so busy. Everyone is working full time. We are trying so hard to make sure that our kids get to sport, to Kumon, to piano lessons. I think that it has to be made easier for people to participate. As Jann was saying, make it relevant, make it meaningful and make it easy to participate.

Mrs STUCKEY: And fun.

Ms NELSON: I would like to absolutely endorse what you have just said. Two things are happening with volunteer organisations across Australia. The people who run them are dying. Our age is catching up. I see that in the rural community in which I live. The rodeo committee has just folded and the Lions group has folded. The CWA is still quite strong, the Red Cross is still quite strong and the history group is still quite strong. We have been recruiting through the history group, which I am involved with, to get younger people involved. We have high school students getting involved, young mums getting involved and people are getting more involved where their children are either late high school, early university or going to work. We have all been through it: when you have younger family, you are flat out like a lizard drinking, really. You just do not have the time.

I agree with what Jann is saying, too: be more innovative. Politics is the same. You can just die of boredom unless you take embroidery. That was such a stroke of genius and I did not even realise. I did it because I needed it. I did not realise the impact it would have on everyone around me. Yes, make it interesting, but start with school age; start with the young ones.

Ms Lynch: My name is Angela Lynch. I am the CEO of the Women's Legal Service in Brisbane. What has become apparent, just from watching federal politics recently, is the issue that as a workplace it does not actually have the discrimination laws, anti-harassment laws or anti-bullying laws that every other workplace in the whole of Australia is required to comply with. I wanted your comments in relation to that. If you are drawing people in from business, the community and professions, they are very used to working within structures that apply those rules and you have policies and procedures that you can go to if there is a breach. Of course, that does not always work perfectly—and we all know that—in any profession.

I am interested in your notion of parliament as a workplace. Obviously it is a place where you should be having robust debate, but should there be more of the rules that we in the community are used to in relation to our workplaces? Do you want to comment on that?

Ms PEASE: As the newest member here, I have to say that I was astounded by the behaviour of parliamentarians. I consider myself to be a parliamentarian and with that comes a burden of responsibility while I am representing my community. I would like to think that at any time they watch me I would be behaving in an appropriate manner, one that I am proud of and one so that my constituents would also feel that way about me. However, sadly, that is not the case. I think that standards have certainly slipped and they are slipping and slipping. You have alluded to that. As the newest member, I feel that it is my responsibility to behave in an appropriate manner.

I am currently the senior government whip, so I consider that if I act in an appropriate manner and if I engage with the new members of parliament and talk respectfully to people, hopefully we will get through that. I have had conversations, particularly with the huge number of woman who have come through, particularly on the government side of the House, where we actually all feel the same—many of us—that we are astounded. We have all come from different workplaces. We have worked in industry and outside of politics. It is astounding, the way that some people behave.

I have had to call people out on behaviour in committee hearings. I have got up and left the room because I do not appreciate the behaviour. I think that is an okay thing to do. I think we should all be braver and call people out on bad behaviour, if needs be. It is also very easy to get caught up in the frenzy in the chamber, because everyone gets whipped into all of that. I think that we have to remember that just because we work in here does not mean we are not representing the people in our electorate. They would want to see me behave in an appropriate manner, just as if they were seeing me down in Edith Street in Wynnum. That is what I would take up.

Mrs STUCKEY: If I look back at the behaviour from when I first came in to now, I would say overall that it was bad and it is still bad. I do not know any other workplace that would tolerate this bullying. I am absolutely amazed there have not been more suicides; I am amazed that there have not been more people on prescription drugs. I know the bullying that I was put under, particularly by Rob Schwarten, when they said I was probably better off dead. The cartoon in the *Bulletin* actually said, 'Toughen up and get some Botox, love'. I used to point my car south and just pray that I would get home alright, after a really bruising week in here. I am sharing this because it is true. I have spent a lot of my career in opposition, often on the front bench. I always felt, as I said, that just because I was the middle child I did not hold back. I am very glad that I am still here. I am not on prescription drugs—not for depression, anyway. I think it would not be tolerated anywhere else.

What used to be considered witty debate and clever language is now just curses hurled across the chamber. Whenever you see a shift in governments—obviously, I have not been in government much at all; only once—and you see a large number of new members come in, particularly younger members, it really worries me that that is the behaviour that they are learning. Many politicians, including myself sometimes, have left this place—apart from when I am really battered—and actually thought, 'That's not the person you are'. That is not the person that I am. Over the years, I have checked myself so many times. I say to my husband and my friends, 'Am I still the Jann that you knew?' I do not want to lose her and I do not want to lose what she stands for.

Ms NELSON: To get to the actual nitty-gritty of what should be happening, in my view, certainly standards have declined dramatically in the past 25 years in terms of how people speak to one another. What happened that night with me was in gest. There was no nastiness. There was a bit of ridicule of one of my colleagues who had a weight issue and I was defending him when I got into that situation. The fellow came and apologised to me later. It was a different world. It was not the same.

I have to say that if people behaved badly, they were thrown out. Sometimes they were thrown out without pay. There were different ways you could be thrown out. I think that the role of the Speaker has become diminished in the parliaments, as well. They should be able to say to someone, 'You are named', under whatever it is and you get two goes and you are out. You can be out for a fortnight or a month or longer, depending on the crime. After what happened in the Senate some time ago, that Senator should have been sent off for three months without pay for bad behaviour, for what he said to Senator Hanson-Young. That was utterly appalling.

There is a general decline. What should happen is that the power of the Speaker should be reintroduced in its traditional form, because, in fact, the Speaker has the power to send you to jail. He can send you to court. The Speakers have great powers in parliamentary democracies and they are not using them. They need to start using them. Also, there need to be codes not just for ministerial conduct but also for parliamentary conduct that actually prevent some of that behaviour from taking place. We need a few good lawyers to get some of that written down.

The other side of that, which you also have to remember, is that we have inherited something from the Greeks of thousands of years ago, which is the fierceness of the debate. Who could debate the most fiercely won the day, instead of going to war. That is what it was all about. Whoever won the strength of the debate won the day, and often many lives were saved. There is a balance to be drawn between the strength of debate and the way people are treated.

Ms Meiklejohn: Thank you very much for everything today. It has been wonderful listening to your experiences. My name is Ainslie Meiklejohn and I am a PhD candidate at Griffith University. I would like to hear a little more about your everyday experiences, most specifically with what might be known as everyday sexism. Joan, you spoke recently in the paper about when you are the chair and the person speaks to your male colleague instead of directly to you. I would like to know if there are any more of those examples and any other little moments like that, which you could share?

Ms PEASE: This is bizarre: I am the youngest and I always go last! That does continue. I am not a chair of a committee, but I get an opportunity to ask questions. When I ask a question, the response will be directed back through the chair. Maybe that is part of the whole meeting process, but I find it intriguing given that I am the one who has asked the question.

Interestingly, people know me in the Wynnum Manly area. If I come into town with my husband or even if I am out in the electorate with my husband, people will talk to my husband rather than talk to me, even though he is not the member for Lytton—although he might like to be. I have an electorate employee who is a young man. When he and I are in here together or out at events, although not necessarily in the electorate because people know he works with me, people will talk to him before they talk to me. I find that astounding, because he is 20.

Those are some of my experiences. I find it amazing that people will always defer to the male. If you are with a male, they will pretty much always—always—refer to the male.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thanks, Joan. I concur along those lines. I will never forget we did a Friends of Taipei trip and I went with a taller male colleague, but I was the shadow minister. Everyone started bowing to him and he said, 'She's the boss.' It was interesting.

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As far as the meeting protocol and all of that, you can dispel so much of it if you just understand the protocol of a meeting—how to chair a meeting and everybody knows the rules. I do not think enough of that happens because, when new members come into the House, you get a three-day puppy school called an induction and then often you do not get to put that into practice immediately. I think we all know that, if you do something only once or if you learn it and then you do not get to practise it a few times, you may easily get led by the behaviour of others.

I think it comes down to, again, just that general distrust of politics and politicians overall. Sometimes it is the loudest voice that is heard regardless of whether you are a man or a woman. For me, I have to say that, after your husband has been a GP in Coolangatta for nearly 30 years and you have been Dr Stuckey's wife, it is really nice when everyone says, 'You're Jann's husband, aren't you.' It is nice that that happens as well.

I do not want to focus on that. I will go back to what I said in the beginning. I was one of three girls. I did not know that boys were meant to be the dominant side of things. I did not know any different. What I did not say then was that my mother passed away when I was only 14. I could not go to her funeral because I had to mind my younger sister. It was amazing that everybody was saying to my father, 'Aren't you lucky you have three girls to cook and clean for you.' I remember thinking then, 'Not this little black duck. There's more to me than that.' I have to say that, when I got married I said to my husband, 'I can cook, clean, do a mean roast and work as well.' I had knocked off all of that housework stuff by the time I was 16 so that I could get on with what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

Ms NELSON: There are rules for meetings that we follow. I discovered by watching something on television the other day that in the national parliament they have stopped talking about maiden speeches; they talk about first speeches. I thought, 'For crying out loud, do they not know anything about cricket?' because that is where it came from. Nobody goes back to look at the past to see why things were decided, why things were created. They do not know that the term 'chairman' means man—manus, I rule, I rule the chair. We have made all of these changes that we think are making things better that are irrelevant. It is how people behave. I think it is important that we follow the rules of meetings, particularly in committee meetings, so that everybody gets a go at it.

In terms of sexism, I can remember going—and I learned the lesson very quickly—to a function and a minister from another state, or somewhere, asked me to get him a drink because I was wearing black and white. I said, 'I'd love a drink, too. Would you mind getting me one?' You just have to do it. You just have to be up-front and not be the waitress, which he obviously thought I was, because I was probably one of two women in the room.

The other thing is that, in terms of my husband, John and I had a routine. People would sidle up to him and ask, 'What is it like being married to Beryce?' We developed this little routine. We would play this little game of how we responded to those questions. Because there were only two of women in the parliament and it was still a novelty, people wanted to know what his views were. So we decided that we would make it humorous rather than take it seriously. Yes, sexism was definitely alive and well in the 1970s and 1980s and I am not sure that it is that much better now.

Ms Bolton: Everyone, I am Sandy Bolton, the Independent member for Noosa. I appreciate so much the candour in this discussion. For those who do not know me, I am the baby and, because I am not attached to a political party, I see things a little differently. I have been quite outspoken about the importance of very developing a different culture—moving away from the bullying and the combative nature of the major parties, which I also see as having that impact on women. When you have that combative nature, in talking to a lot of women, they feel that they need to become that to prove themselves, whereas I see it a little differently. We do not need to.

Since I have come on board, in a very short length of time I have met the most incredible people—MPs, whether male or female, who do not subscribe to that bullying or being disrespectful. I believe that we have hit a tipping point where the masses, who believe in the importance of developing a new culture, whether that is through empowering the Speaker, is giving the power to the MPs again to say what they will and will not accept within the chamber. I have spent a lot of time talking to a lot of MPs and I know that they want to see that change because their communities want to see that change. They want to lead by example and show that what happens in the chamber should be reflective of what we expect of our communities. Do you believe that we are close to that tipping point?

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Mrs STUCKEY: I think we have passed it. I really do. I think people are tuning out to politicians. They are over it. There has been so much of it at whichever level you are talking about. I think that we all get painted with a very similar brush which, in many cases, has been brought on by our own behaviour.

I also think that not as many people watch the parliament. The grab you get on the news is usually media driven to get the cute grab rather than something really meaningful. That is reflected in our electorates occasionally, too. You have the journalist who will always look to trip you up and then you will get journalists who want to write something that is of genuine interest to the people who live in your electorate, whether it is cost of living or something else.

We are also seeing the number of people in our organisations dwindling. People are just disengaged overall with politics. That is why, again, I spend so much time in my electorate to let people talk to me and meet me and know that, when I come to this place, it is usually to represent Currumbin—and to heck with everywhere else because we have policies and things to debate but I have seen that the people who live in Currumbin do not watch much of this. It is more important that I am raising their issues and concerns.

Ms NELSON: New Zealand is way ahead of us on this. They have already established a working party to look at the issue of how parliament works. They have a very good 21st century approach. They have a website that is interactive and they do interviews. Each day, the Speaker talks about what is going to happen in the parliament, interviews people about what might be said and done and looks at major policy issues. They work in a very positive way to re-engage, or they are working to try to re-engage with their communities in New Zealand. I think that is a model that we could look at to pursue in Australia.

Again, I come back to the point that, if all the members are really concerned about the behaviour, they really need to ask the Speaker to set up a working party to do something about it. I think that would be welcomed, personally.

Ms PEASE: Thanks very much. I think I mentioned in my previous response that in the 55th Parliament when I was first elected there were quite a number of MPs who were speaking regularly trying to bring about change. We continue to have those conversations, but you just get caught up in the giddy world of life in here. Certainly, I believe that, unfortunately, the general public, as Jann said, have labelled all politicians. I know a lot of people do not understand the difference between federal and state politics. Last week, I had half a dozen people come into my office to ask who I was going to vote for in the leadership spill—wrong level of government and wrong party. Perhaps this was not a bad thing for me. It might help me at the next election. I am sure that it happened during the Julia Gillard and Rudd spill as well.

It is disappointing, because all of my colleagues who I work with in here work really hard. We put in incredibly long hours. Someone would ask, 'How was your weekend?' I do not have a weekend. Most MPs do not. We all work hard. We all care about our communities, no matter where we sit in the political pendulum. It is a shame that people do not see us that way. They see us only as some people behaving badly whereas I care, I know Jann cares and I know Beryce cares. I know that all of the members of parliament who are here care and work really hard for their communities. I think it is about educating the community that what they hear and what the media puts out about us is not necessarily accurate.

Ms NELSON: I will just reinforce what Joan said. I think the media plays a great role in bringing politicians down as well. I think that is why New Zealand is going directly to the people using modern technology. I think the media in Australia, particularly the ownership of the media in Australia, has played a terrible role in really trying to destroy democracy in this country regardless of which major party is in power. The other thing I think is the election of Donald Trump as President in America has had a very destructive effect on democracy in the Western World.

Mr FRASER: Stephanie, we might make your question the last.

Ms Heath: I want to draw on what you said about having a strong debate and the strength of debate, because it concerns me. I feel that a combative contest of ideas with a group of very passionate community advocates is different from this issue of bullying and disrespect. I would love to hear your thoughts on that, because I fear that, if we remove all the passion and all the contest of ideas, we end up in this situation of group think. That is why political parties, both left and right and all the various levels in between at the moment, are so important. I would love your opinion on how we find that balance that you were talking about between that contest of ideas and having a respectful parliament.

Mrs STUCKEY: I do not think we would be here if we had the answer. We would all be on the same side, would we not? That would be dull, colourless and boring. I feel at the moment that everything is being media driven. I feel that we are pretty stage-managed, too. Somewhere we need to find that balance

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between a debate that goes until three o'clock in the morning and a debate that needs to happen for those to be heard. I do not think that we have found that yet. Whatever one government puts in, another will get rid of for the sake of doing that, because that is what they do.

I am as befuddled as anyone. Possibly if you look at other models, even question time. If you look at New Zealand and other states, they are different. If you keep doing the same thing the same way, then you will get the same result. Having said that, politicians have always been at the bottom of the list along with used car salesmen. We are embedded there because that is what the public think at the moment. I do not know how we should lift our game. You have heard that as individuals we are trying to do that. A perception is often not reality, but a perception is greater than a reality. It happens like that and it takes years to change.

Ms PEASE: I think there is a big difference between political debate and bullying. You can have respectful debate, whether it be in the chamber, a debating class or at a public rally, but it is the language and the way it is presented and the way you deal with your audience. Acceptance, tolerance and the ability to listen are really things we should all do. In my electorate we have many different opposing groups. I may not necessarily agree with everything they have to say, but I will always listen to them and be prepared to take it on board. We have to have an open mind. I think that is part of the problem with regard to your question. I do not think people are prepared to really listen and think, 'Just because it is not my position does not mean it is wrong: it is just a different position,' and treat people respectfully. I think it goes back to Trumpian politics. We have lost the art of tolerance.

Ms NELSON: I think we have to be careful not to lose the democracy of the Greeks. I think we do have keep those strong debates and passion that you talk about—have the proper processes in place—without making it bland. It would be terrible if it became bland. If we think there is a lack of interest now, there would be a total switch-off. I really do think it comes down to new ways of communicating with more people in more relevant ways and using the technologies that are available such as podcasts or interactive websites. There are all sorts of things we could or should do that we can do right now, and they are going to get better and better.

The other thing that came up at the conference which was held recently was the idea of having groups of individuals come in who have been selected by job lot, basically at random from the electoral roll. They come in and sit with a committee and they make their contribution. One of the best ways of getting people to interact with you again is to actually get them involved. I notice that Di Farmer is doing that with a group. I notice that in Victoria they have introduced it as a structure, and I think New South Wales is looking at it as well. I think one of the really effective ways we could get people involved is by giving them ownership of the parliament.

Mr FRASER: Thank you very much. I think we will have to draw it to a close now. I would like to thank Beryce Nelson, Jann Stuckey and Joan Pease—particularly Joan, who filled in at the last moment. We appreciate your comments. Clearly there is interest in the topic and some people somewhere have much work to do. I would like to ask you to join me in thanking our three speakers. As is becoming a tradition, I would like to offer our guests a gift.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for attending tonight. We are having refreshments on level 5 of the Annexe. I would encourage those of you who have, even if it is sort of a rustic interest in politics, to consider joining the ASPG. We do not insist that you hold a PhD. We do not insist that you be a member of parliament or the Clerk of a parliament. We simply ask for members who have an interest in parliament and discussing parliament with like-minded individuals. We will have membership forms available with refreshments, so I would ask you to partake of drinks, food and a membership form. Thanks for your attendance.