

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

***Forum on Love/Hate
Relationship between
Media and
Parliamentarians***

**THURSDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2000
Parliament House
Brisbane**

Reported by Parliamentary Reporting Staff

Dr PAUL REYNOLDS: Welcome to the ASPG forum this evening. The order of speaking will be that Bill Hewitt will speak first and he will be followed by Tony Koch, then the Honourable Anna Bligh and then Peter Wear. I will introduce all the speakers now so that I do not have to bob up and down as they come to the microphone. The speakers will speak for about 15 or 20 minutes back to back. After they have spoken we will give them a chance to respond to each other and then there will be an opening for questions and comments from the floor. We have a roving mike and Andrew, who is sitting at the back, will move through the audience with that. When all questions and comments are exhausted I have great pleasure to invite you to the Strangers Bar for a cash bar and free supper. At the end of this evening's proceedings Damon Blake, our Treasurer, will have a little word to say, a little commercial, about membership.

I would like to start by saying that the Queensland Chapter of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group was the last chapter in Australasia to be founded in 1993 under the auspices of the Honourable Mr Speaker Fouras. We are now the largest chapter and most active chapter in Australasia. In July we hosted an extremely successful national conference. We have three meetings a year, including our annual general meeting in May, and we are very hopeful that at our next annual general meeting we will have the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser to address us on his reminiscences of his years in Federal Parliament. We do this because we are bipartisan, because two years ago we had the Right Honourable Gough "Thy God" Whitlam. Anyway, we are hopeful for that.

This meeting was the brainchild of Bill Hewitt who is, with me, the only member of the chapter with continuous membership on the executive committee. I mentioned how active and how large we are, and this has in great measure to do with the wonderful work that Bill does for us as an active member, as one who promotes our work in his own networks and somebody who is thoroughly committed to the work of the Parliament as he was when he was indeed a member of the Parliament. I pay tribute to Bill for his work here.

The work of the chapter is to promote the study of Parliament and its institutional work with our democratic polity. As we look on the world today, God knows we need to know and appreciate the work of Parliament as an institution, as so many societies have yet to discover that and as we, indeed in Queensland, had yet to discover it.

Bill's idea for tonight was to talk about the love/hate relationship between politics and the media. There are an endless number of works that have been written about the interface between journalism and media and politics and Parliament—the interface and symbiotic relationships. Some of you who have been students have read all of this to death and we do not want to do any of that. Bill's idea was to bring the personalities together and the idea was to have a dialogue between politicians and journalists about this kind of situation. Bill will be our first speaker.

Bill Hewitt was the member for Greenslopes until 1983. He was a chairman of committees in the Parliament when the Parliament did not amount, one should say, for a great deal. But he worked tirelessly with Mike Ahern in that period of the Parliament to elevate Parliament as an institution, as against the Government and the Executive. Bill paid the price, as indeed Mike in the end did also, for trying to do that. Bill has a very good and unique view of the Parliament and a deep held belief in the institution of Parliament.

He will then be followed by Tony Koch, Chief Reporter of the Courier-Mail. Tony was chairman of the gallery of reporters here for many years in the 1970s and 1980s. He saw Parliament at its worst and, arguably perhaps, at its best. He wrote the definitive book on the 1983 State election. I know he will not mind me saying that he actually thought that Joh would go, and the book was originally entitled "Joh KO-ed". But when in fact the results came he quickly shifted the title to "Joh's KO". One of the little vignettes of history.

The Honourable Anna Bligh, Minister for welfare and a thousand million other things, for putting down the Heiner inquiry bullshit. Her quote about that in Hansard is absolutely memorable—I have quoted it in the book on One Nation—about how "we eat the Cabinet attendance lists". It brought a conference in Sydney, Anna, to its feet. They didn't believe that Queensland parliamentarians could have such wit. She cut her teeth, as many did, at the University of Queensland student union—the politics of the sandpit. She went on to better and greater things. I should say about Anna that she has a snake pit portfolio. That brings to mind a

wonderful story after a British general election when Prime Minister phones front bench hopeful and says—it has to be Thatcher, doesn't it?; that woman—"Good news and bad news. The good news is that you're in Cabinet. The bad news: secretary of state for Northern Ireland." I do not think Anna has got that wild card, but she has a difficult portfolio and one that is very media sensitive.

And now we come to Peter Wear. Well, what the hell can you say about Peter Wear? Enraged every New Zealand migrant in the State and now wants to confer sainthood on One Nation members. It defies me. I have known Peter for many, many years. His wife is a very valued colleague of mine. But I think as far as Peter Wear is concerned he must speak for himself. Without further ado, may I ask you to welcome Bill Hewitt.

Mr BILL HEWITT: I would like to take you 34 years into the past, to 1966, at the start of my parliamentary career. Across the road was the Bellevue Hotel, still trading, selling Fourx beer off the wood. You poor souls who drink beer from those steel containers these days do not understand the ecstasy of drinking beer off the wood. The great virtue of the Bellevue in those days was that the bar was functioning, and it was a place of coming together of parliamentarians, journalists, public servants and constituents who wanted to be close to the Parliament but just a little bit removed from the prevailing atmosphere of it. The great virtue of the public bar of the Bellevue was that you could hear the division bells ring in the Chamber. If you were young and athletic—I was both of those in those days—you could swill your beer down in a hurry, race across the lights, often against the red, and be in the Chamber comfortably inside two minutes to vote. I confess that we ran against the red lights. I hope you don't tell the CJC about it. But in my defence I want to say that those were the worst of the misdemeanours we committed in those days. To reinforce that point of view, I feel the friendly hand of Russ Hinze on my shoulder saying, "That's right, son. That's right."

In the bar very frequently was a fellow named Brian Harris. Brian to me was the archetypal parliamentary roundsman, as they used to call them in those days. His hat had the permanent curve. His suit and the dry cleaner never established even a passing acquaintance. A notebook was poked permanently in his side pocket. To complete the caricature, there was always a cigarette hanging from the corner of the mouth. It was an ill-concealed secret that a special friendship existed between Brian Harris and Gordon Chalk. Gordon at that time was the State Treasurer and Deputy Premier and a pretty good guy. Gordon used to use Brian to have organised, disciplined leaks. I remind you that Brian was from the Telegraph—a respectable afternoon paper that each afternoon put out three editions, which is quite significant. But occasionally Brian would get a breakthrough from another source—a leak that sometimes was premature, sometimes that embarrassed Gordon. And Gordon found it necessary at party meetings to cut loose on Brian Harris. All these years later, in only the last week or 10 days, I have asked myself seriously whether the anger was real or simulated, and I am tending to the latter point of view. But whenever I think about the love/hate relationship that exists between parliamentarians and journalists, I always think about Brian Harris—very much a character of his times who epitomised so much of reporting in those days.

So what is this relationship that we are attempting to explore tonight? At the bottom level you could say it is two professions that really have a great dependency upon each other. Put aside for a moment the altruism of what journalism is all about. At the bottom level they are working people. They are professional people and they have to justify their existence by reporting, by revealing, by keeping you informed. From the political point of view, they are people in charge of the affairs of this country. They want you to know what is happening and what is proposed, although from their point of view they always like to put a positive interpretation upon it. So that is at the bottom level what it is all about—a dependence upon each other, a reality that they cannot do without each other, and yet at times a very thorny relationship. But that is at the bottom level.

The best way of saying it is that in a vibrant democracy such as ours the relationship is instrumental in giving you the right to know. And no right can be more basic in an open society than the right to know. Is that right absolute? Can that right sometimes be delayed? Can that right sometimes be conditional? The answer is yes, and it should be. I am bound to say that there is great credit upon both bodies that, in terms of national security and sometimes apprehension of criminals and the pursuit of a criminal investigation, there is tolerance and there

is sometimes a holding back. That reflects great credit particularly upon the journalistic fraternity. But the bottom line is that we in an open, vibrant democracy have the right to know.

I have no problem with that. What I would like to explore is the ongoing relationship and how they treat each other. I have to say from a personal point of view: I like to talk about the profession of politics. I spent my life being sad about the way it is degraded when it should be elevated. There should be great pride in the profession of politics. Not for a moment am I going to say that politicians do enough to help their own cause. They let themselves down very, very badly on many occasions, and I would be happy to explore that issue further by way of question.

I want to talk about how they relate to each other and how I believe the relationship should exist. The high watermark, as far as I am concerned, is an experience I had when I was in England in 1979 attending a Speakers' conference. I digress to say that nothing in my parliamentary career remotely touched that experience. That was the high watermark of my political career—to be in London to be at a Speakers' conference and do all the things that we were allowed to do in that wonderful city. While I was there, James Callaghan, the then Labour Prime Minister, was in the last days of his prime ministership. As my wife and I left England he was defeated on the floor of the Commons. One night I was watching a television program called Panorama. There were three very distinguished journalists who interviewed Callaghan. This was at the height of Cold War and intercontinental ballistics were very much an item. I think the Trident program was one that England was heavily involved in or potentially was going to be involved in. So this was a great moment for these journalists—to look at a Prime Minister who was under heavy pressure and was about to be defeated. They did everything journalists should do, but they never forgot for a moment that this was the Prime Minister of Great Britain they were interviewing. There was a great underlying sense of decency and respect. Words like, "Prime Minister, with great respect", "Prime Minister, may I remind you of this?". It was one of the civilised debates I have always looked back on and I have always thought, "that is my expectation." I think national interviewers the likes of Laurie Oakes, Paul Bongiorno and Kerry O'Brien—I do not share the paranoia of my political party, the Liberal Party, as far as Kerry O'Brien is concerned—handle their profession with great decency. They are in the business of extracting information, but they exchange the courtesy that is expected.

My criticism these days applies mainly to open line radio. The Courier-Mail, incidentally, has done a superb job in using freedom of information to its maximum advantage and in many ways these days it can bypass the political participants by focusing upon the documents, getting themselves fully briefed and then asking the pertinent questions. But I think of some recent examples of open line interrogation. I go back a few weeks to when John Barton was holding up the end for the 8.30 radio spot on the ABC. I say nothing to John's personal detriment; I think he is a highly professional person. On one occasion he had on David Hamill, Rob Borbidge and David Watson. I thought, "This is a bit of a strange balance—two on one. I thought we were a bit particular about one on one." Having interrogated David, John used the term, "Will you hold on a moment?" If you listen to open line programs, you know that this happens quite frequently. I think I have heard it happen to the Minister quite recently. I have certainly heard it applied to the Premier of the State, Peter Beattie. "Will you hold on a moment?" To me, that is an absence of respect and it is an absence of an understanding of the pressures that Ministers and Premiers and Treasurers live under day by day and minute by minute. I think those people are generous with their time, but to presume that people waiting to speak to them, to bring delegations, can wait, that the Premier or the Treasurer can just sit there on an open line, "Sure, I will listen, I will wait, I will respond", I think is less than a courtesy that people in those high offices are entitled to. I would like open line programs to look at themselves a little more critically in those terms.

Overall, I think we have a healthy relationship. I would like to talk about political parties. I am a strong believer in the party political system we have in this country. Look at Greece and France and Italy in the postwar years when Governments fell like dominos because they coalesced, they fell apart. In 100 years of unbroken democracy we have had one crisis only, and that was 1975, which was resolved very quickly. While there are great critics of the rigid political system, which I concede is too rigid, nevertheless it has served this country very, very well. While I have great respect for an Independent like Liz Cunningham, I think the stability of our system would be served a disservice if we had a high incidence of Independents. But I suspect I move a little bit from the central theme, and I should not do that. So in broad terms I think it is a healthy

relationship. It will always be a little bit suspicious. There will always be some animosity and hostility but, importantly, it serves the greater good, and the greater good in a democratic society is your right to know.

Mr TONY KOCH: My name is Tony Koch. I have been with the Courier-Mail for 18 years. I was chief parliamentary reporter here for 15 years and president of the press gallery for 10. They were wonderful years, and this place has a lot of wonderful memories for me. We are truly honoured to be in this building to discuss this subject, for a reason which I will outline to you very quickly.

The official record of Parliament is known as Hansard, after the British family which was first given the rights to report Parliament. Actually, the first records of this Parliament, in this very Chamber, were done by a shorthand writer from the Brisbane Courier newspaper at the time, because the Parliament did not employ its own shorthand writers. So for three years our newspaper supplied the records here before they employed their own staff. In fact, those days went on for a little while. The Queensland Parliament is the second oldest in the world to produce a daily Hansard. The reason for it—I will read it to you shortly from the official record—is that members were sick of being misrepresented. So what they did was resolve here to produce a daily Hansard, which was then included in the Brisbane Courier and distributed among all the worthy citizens who bought the paper. The circulation of the paper suffered so badly that they were forced to abandon that after a couple of years, and we now have a situation where it is produced daily and it goes on the web and everything else. It is all very efficient.

I must say that, while we are discussing love and hate with politicians, in my years as president of the gallery here they had some dreadful blunders with us, and some dreadful blunders to blame with. I must say that Bill was certainly a source of great reason. I certainly acknowledge that. We were not even allowed as press gallery members—I am talking right through the 1980s—to get a tape recording of what was going on in Parliament. They would not allow television cameras in the Parliament. This is the joint party rooms. This is mostly the coalition—well, it was. The coalition parties decided it, but I think they got a nod and a wink from Labor anyway. We had to deal with them and in particular had to deal with Bill Knox in the Liberal Party and the Speakers at the time that they changed a little bit—Lin Powell and Kev Lingard.

Anybody who did not have good shorthand or who could not sit through the Parliament the whole time and wanted to put a tape recorder beside the in-house TV had to watch out that the attendants did not come, because if they came they would confiscate your tape recorder. We were denied access to the Hansard records. We could not go near the parliamentary reporters to check things. Then of course they would whinge if somebody got it wrong.

I will just take you back a little bit here. I must acknowledge Tim Moroney from the staff here for doing this wonderful research, which he put out some years ago. To counter the misreporting of the Queensland parliamentary debates by local newspapers, the Queensland Parliament in 1877 began issuing a daily Hansard to be circulated with the colony's newspapers. Although successful at first, the decline in circulation, rise in costs and better reporting of the Parliament's proceedings by the newspapers forced the Parliament to end its newspaper distribution in 1893.

There are some wonderful quotes here in this material about that. I will not bore you; it is just worth hearing. One of the factors influencing the quality and quantity of political reporting in Queensland was the introduction of the daily Hansard in 1877. It was the first in the world without any form of Government censorship. I think that is a thing that we all should be marvellously proud of. In the parliamentary debate 12 years later Mr J. G. Drake said that before the daily Hansard had begun, constant complaints had been made in the House that members were not reported at all in the daily press. Complaints had also been made that the reporting was very capricious and sometimes almost unfair. So we can see that disapproval between the press and the politicians goes back a long way. I will certainly take you back shortly and let you into some secrets on that.

It was as a consequence of these numerous complaints that the daily Hansard was established. When the Northern Argus newspaper remarked a year later that the daily Hansard still had not appeared, it observed that "the reported debates are quite full enough at present, and any material additional to their length can only add to their dreariness".

The Premier at the time, Premier Moorehead, is quoted as saying that all members were very anxious that the Hansard was not being distributed. It was decided then to distribute it among members. When a debate had been of more than ordinary importance, members had sent 800 to 1,000 copies for circulation through newspapers in their constituencies. It had been arranged that a number of copies should be sent to hospitals. Premier Moorehead said, "We do not want to kill the poor patients." Even back in those days they appreciated that it was pretty heavy going.

I thought Paul was going to tell my favourite story when he spoke about Maggie Thatcher. That there was an Irish member of the Commons called Tim Healy. He was getting stuck into the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, and Gladstone was moved to stand up and protect himself and he said, "I object to that. I object to what the member is saying to me. I will have him know I am the guardian of my honour", to which Healy replied, "I congratulate the honourable member on his sinecure."

In the Queensland Parliament there have been a lot of characters. The one I had most to do with or appreciated most in the early days was Kev Hooper, who has left us now. I can remember one time when John Barton, about whom Bill spoke and who is a good friend of mine, used to run TDT. He wanted Kev to come on to debate a woman the older ones here remember called Rona Joyner, who was a spoiler in relation to progressive education in this State. She was a good friend of the Bjelke-Petersen Government. Anyway, Hooper refused to go on Barton's TV show that night and do it. I overheard this conversation and Barton was perplexed. Anyway, he walked away and I said to Kev, "Why did you bail up on that, having a debate with Rona?" I should describe for you first for ones of you who do not know Rona. She was a little mousy lady—very proper but very churchy, and she used to wear a hat with grapes on it. She would come out with these outrageous suggestions—stopping sex education in schools and so on. Hooper said to me, "I'll give you the golden rule always." He said, "Look at me. I'm six feet two, 16 stone and florid faced. She's five foot nothing and six stone. How would I look debating her on television?" He said, "I can't win. The golden rule of all debates for politicians is that you never debate a woman who wears fruit on her hat."

He is also the one who came in late one night into the other chamber, which sometimes used to sit right through the night. Different members are in. Some are asleep. Some are having a few grogs and carrying on. I was trying to write shorthand, because someone was saying something worth recording. He leaned over to me and he said, "Look at them." I paused and I looked down. He said, "You'd never mistake it as a waiting room for Mastermind, would you?" That threw me. I couldn't write for 10 minutes.

We look at the love/hate relationship. My learned colleague Peter Wear is going to look more at the love part, because he is the one who, as everyone who reads his column knows, overflows with the milk of human kindness. I am not so blessed. The reason journalists have a great mistrust of politicians in this State and in this Parliament goes back to the late 1870s. It is recorded here. I will share it with you and expand upon it. It says here that for more than 20 years from the late 1870s Queensland journalists were allowed half fare rail concessions when travelling on business for their newspapers. In 1898 a debate arose in the Legislative Assembly over alleged abuse of the concession. Mr J. T. Annear of Maryborough moved that there be laid upon the table of the House a return showing full details of the press tickets issued by the railway department at Maryborough during the past six months. Mr Annear said—

"Some respectable members of the Press in my electorate have had suspicion cast upon them that they have used the requisition to travel at reduced fares when not on Press duty, and I desire to remove that suspicion from those gentlemen."

Drawn into discussion, Mr Annear suggested that journalists or printers associated with the Labour movement possibly abused the rail concessions, travelling ostensibly to 'cover' party meetings but really to participate in them. Anyway, it transpired that journalists at the time very soon had the privilege of their half fare rail concessions removed from them.

Some of you who have observed this marvellous building from outside will have seen that copper dome out there. To be a member of the press gallery, at a certain time of the year—I can tell you what goes on, but I cannot tell you what time of year it goes on, because I cannot let all the secrets out—there is a ritual you have to attend there. You would have all read the Phantom

comics, where the phantom is pledged to do all things good, defeat evil, kill pirates and all that sort of thing. It went on 400 years and he had to pledge on a skull. That is similar to what journalists have to do, but up there we have up there the skull of Mr J. M. Dawson, this poor journalist from Maryborough, who lost his rail ticket. Each journalist has to pledge that he will devote his life to getting back at politicians for their travel rorts so that we can square up for what happened to him back in 1870. You will see that it is happening to this day. Even Mal Colston can tell you that. We have moved on with the times to telephones. Peter Reith could talk to you about that. He would have to do it personally, because he cannot afford to ring you.

There are some signs of this ritual. It is like the planets lining up. People who hang around the Parliament would be able to pick them up. This is the one time that the very popular Channel 9 political reporter, Spencer Jolly, actually breaks out and has a drink of alcohol, Rob Borbidge smiles and Peter Beattie dodges a camera. This all happens on the one day when this ritual goes on upstairs. That is how it happens and when it happens. That is why we have the hate part of our relationship with politicians, because we are really squaring up for Mr J. M. Dawson of Maryborough.

I really appreciated Bill's speech. I appreciate a lot of things he says about the democratic process. I, too, had a wonderful experience overseas dealing with political people and journalism. That was in 1988. I had been sent over to cover the West German elections. I was fortunate to be able to go to Poland. It was still at the time of the Cold War and I met up with Peter Beattie, who was then the secretary of the Labor Party here. He had been in London on other business. We travelled together for two weeks. We were doing a lot with Solidarity people there. We stayed at the Catholic cathedral in Warsaw—Saint Stanislaus Cathedral in Warszawa. It was only a few months after the Solidarity's priest there, Father Popieluszko, had been murdered by the secret police. His tomb is built at that church. We were incredibly fortunate at the time, because they have a service only once a month—they are illegal services anyway—when they first paid tribute and all people went past the tomb of Father Popieluszko. Because Pope John Paul had announced that he was going to make his first homecoming to his homeland since his appointment to the papacy, they had released 12,000 Solidarity prisoners. I was the first western journalist to be able to interview them. Because of some political shenanigans, I had some pretty high-level access to them, for which I am very thankful. One I interviewed, who later became in more recent times the vice-president of the country, had spent 12 years in jail. He was a professor of pure maths at the University of Warsaw. He was a wonderful travelled man. He had twice scaled Mount Everest. He spent 12 years in jail for publishing in a banned newsletter, and he was caught with two copies of this in his pocket, for which he spent 12 years in jail. Everywhere we went, Beattie and I, in Poland we were followed. Phones were openly tapped. As I said, Father Popieluszko has just been murdered. Pope John Paul had sent these 12 Swiss Guards to his replacement priest, whom we were staying with, to be his protectors there. They were introduced as his curates, but they were huge young men and fit. I remember one fellow leaned over to give the priest a drink and his coat fell open. There was an Uzi submachine gun inside his cassock.

It really struck home to me when I had covered the West German elections. I had just gone back to London at that time, in time to meet up with some colleagues just as water cannons and hoses were turned on in the strikes at Wapping. It was amazing to have this Polish experience, where wonderful people, honest people, had been jailed because they wanted to get the free message out. Thirty thousand people stood in the snow for two hours to listen to the mass. That was the only place they could hear the uncensored, unfettered word. The priest who took the mass read snippets that he got—little notes that he got telling people things as basic as the prices of food and what was going on in the free world. It really affected me, similar to what Bill was saying, to appreciate what a wonderful free world and what a wonderful free country we have here. I resolved to come back and try to demonstrate my appreciation of it by being a bit of a better journalist. Whether I have succeeded in that I do not know.

We all have these spiritual experiences. I remember coming back on the plane and being really sort of moved by it. I got back on a Saturday morning in early February 1998. You never hear anything about Australian politics in Europe and I got off at the Sydney airport at 4 o'clock in the morning. I was hungry for news and I saw a newspaper poster for the Australian newspaper. The streaming story was: "Joh—I will be PM". I looked at it and I thought, "I'll get back on that bloody plane if that's right. I can't believe it."

Anyway, it was a marvellous thing that happened and it was marvellous Joh didn't get to be PM, too. I have had a great time here. I think Queensland has had a very vigorous political system. I think you now have a much more watchful, much more vigilant media. There are better relations between them because each has had to pick up their game. Fitzgerald taught us that. I hope that we have learned to serve you well. It is a pleasure to be a part of this tonight. Thank you.

Hon. ANNA BLIGH—Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be with you. The two previous speakers have had a lot more experience of this place than I have, but in the relatively short time I have been here, having been elected in 1995, I can certainly attest to the fact that this is a place of passionate politics. It is a place that requires passionate language to describe those politics. That passionate language is here on a regular basis. "Love" and "hate" are words of passion, and I have certainly experienced both extremes in my relationship with some media outlets during the relatively short period of time I have been here.

As both of the previous speakers have raised in one way or another, a vigilant, well-researched, committed media that is guided by a very strong view that the public has a right to know about its political structures and the people who work within it is a very essential part of a healthy democracy. We in Queensland I think probably know that more than any other part of the Australia, having had the history we have had, alluded to by Tony, where perhaps the media was a bit more complacent than it is now about reporting accurately the toings and froings of Government.

I, like the previous speakers, absolutely support the need for that sort of media. I also, like other members of this room and your association, take great pleasure in the kind of democracy we share in this country. Like others, I know what happens in other parts of the world. My pleasure is heightened whenever I have an opportunity to compare the democracy that we enjoy in this country with that that so many others are still seeking.

As the Divinyls told us when I was a young girl, there is a very fine line between pleasure and pain. It has been my experience that members of the press gallery and members of the Parliament basically get by in the respective tasks and responsibilities that they share by a relationship in which they are required often to use each other. That use can be a pleasurable experience or a painful experience, and I would like to talk a little bit about why that is so.

I think the Queensland experience is probably true of most State environments. I cannot talk about the Federal environment. For those of you who have not had an opportunity to look through the Chamber, it is roughly the same size as this Chamber. When you fill it up with 89 politicians and the parliamentary staff and you have the press gallery all in force around the verandas up there during question time, you are struck immediately, particularly if you are one of the people down on the floor of the Chamber, with how much it resembles a fish bowl and what a very, very small environment it is. Yet, big and momentous things can happen in it. But for those people for whom it is their daily life—I guess that describes members of the press gallery and members of the Parliament—in comparative terms it is very, very small working environment. There are four TV channels—I hope Briz 31 won't take offence—that are part of the parliamentary process, and each of them has a main political reporter. Often they will bring maybe one or two others in. We have a one paper town, with the Courier-Mail having a number of reporters associated with the Parliament. Not all of the radio stations in Brisbane report the Parliament regularly or have people stationed here. So if you take the Ministry, perhaps four or five people from the front bench of the two coalition parties currently in Opposition and occasionally a member of the backbench, the One Nation party or an Independent who might pop up into the newsworthy categories of what is happening on a daily basis down here, you realise that it is a very small group of people, and you get to know each other probably better than you would have expected to or better sometimes than you would like to. It often feels to me that familiarity in those circumstances can breed a great deal of contempt. I have certainly seen it do that. I do not know that there is any way around that, but it sometimes feels like not a very healthy environment.

Obviously the Parliament is one of the most important institutions of our democracy, but for those of us who are down here on a daily basis it is also a workplace. Like all other workplaces, people are keen to get on with the people they work with and are keen to form

friendships. I think all of us have from time to time tried to bridge the professional gaps between particular representative of the media and those of us representing political parties. It is a very, very difficult divide to bridge, and it requires an enormous degree of professionalism on both sides. It is not unusual to think that you have bridged it and then find that, in fact, that person has a job to do and they will print the story whichever way they are going to print it, regardless of what you thought might have been a good friendship or at least a reasonable drinking partnership. That is a lesson people have to learn.

It is also a workplace in which gathered are, almost by definition, 89 pretty strong egos. Sometimes I guess people get pushed into it not knowing what they are taking on, but for the most part people do not put themselves forward to represent the people with whom they share a neighbourhood or community unless they have a pretty substantial ego. I would suggest that the profession of journalism also lends itself to those people who like to see their name in print, even if it is only as a by-line. There are certainly people in the gallery who are there to make a career for themselves—there to break the big story, there to be the one journalist who sees through all of the things that are going on and gets the scoop of the day—just as there are politicians on the floor of the House of all political persuasions who are there to cut a dashing figure in question time, who are there to be the main attraction, who are there to be the ones who, again, make the next big career move in their profession. That is an environment that I think is basically a recipe for a very strong and passionate relationship and one that is characterised often by both love and hate.

I wanted tonight, given the company that I am in, to make some very brief comments about the relationship between the particular relationship between the media in the political environment and women politicians. There is still a minority of women in the Parliament. I am one of 16 out of 89, and this is the most the Queensland Parliament has ever had. So I think it is fair to say that we are still in many respects a novelty and we still have novelty value in a media sense. It has certainly been my experience—I know that my other female colleagues have shared this—that it is very rare for a profile piece or a long interview to be conducted with me by either male or female journalists where there is not a great deal of questions asked about a blurring of divide between my public and personal life and questions about how I juggle my job with my family responsibilities, whether I feel guilty about leaving my children and those sorts of questions which I have never heard Rob Borbidge or Peter Beattie being asked. I cannot imagine, frankly, some of the journalists who have asked them of me wanting to ask them of my male colleagues.

I actually do not know whether that is a good or bad thing. I certainly felt when I was confronted with those questions that it was an invasion of my privacy and that my male colleagues were not being asked these questions and perhaps I should not answer them. The experience I had when I did answer them was overwhelming, particularly women in my own electorate talking to me when they never had before—coming up to me in the supermarket or at school or at the child-care centre and saying, "I read that article about you. You know, I have that problem, too." And, "Gee, that is really interesting." It has made me think a little bit more about perhaps media journalists reflecting a little bit the audience they are writing for. The journalists who were asking me those questions perhaps had a better sense of what women in the electorate might be interested in about me than I had myself. So it is a useful thing when you are being asked questions like that. I have certainly learnt over that five years to consider the possibility that the journalist asking the question has more experience of the readership. It does not always mean I answer the question, but there is a fine line between the public and the private.

Last Sunday I was at a Labor Party function of Labor women. A number of candidates were present and I and a couple of other Ministers were answering questions on the panel. One of the questions was how did we conduct ourselves in order to avoid unfair criticism by the media. I felt it important to say to these people that if they had any aspirations of putting themselves into public life—that is what they are doing; it is not just a political life—they had to realise that they were putting themselves forward into the public arena as a public person. The minute you make that decision, whether it is as politician, an elite sportsperson, a movie star or whatever it is, as soon as you make a decision to move into that public realm you have to expect that you will be the subject of a great deal of scrutiny. With that comes unfair criticism. There is no way of doing this that does not end up with some parts of people's scrutiny of you being unfair, simply because

the media reflects the public that it is catering to and the public is not fair. The public will not make fair assessments of who I am or my ideas on all occasions. They will make their own conclusions, bringing with them their own prejudices, their own knowledge and their own ideas about my ideas. So I have to take that with a grain of salt.

This is one of the things it takes some time to get used to. I came into politics from working very much in the back room of that Labor Party, although at the moment that is not something I would necessarily concede in those terms. I might just rephrase that. I was very much a backroom player, very much someone who was handing out how to vote cards and being on committees but not a public profile person. I was used to having a very high degree of control over my own life. One of the realities about the relationship between public people and politicians and the Parliament is that, once you have created the story or once you have the information and you put it into the public realm—that is, you have given a journalist a leak, some information or a press release—you then lose all control of what happens to it. You then are unable completely to have any further influence on it. The journalist and the organisation for which they work, will then do with it whatever they will. When that first happens it is a terrifying thing. I have to say, some journalists just reprint your press release, and I love that. That is a love relationship. Unfortunately, those journalists are not in the majority—or fortunately, as the case may be. Most journalists will take with one or two of your comments and then they will go and get comments from somebody else who you may or may not know, or may or may not like. In my case they usually go and get comments from Denver Beanland. He and I do not see eye to eye on very many things. Nor do I regard him as a commentator that I respect. So we hate that. I hate that, Tony, when your paper does that.

But it is that lack of control that can be almost a scary experience, because it just sort of goes. It is not just the journalists who have the control. Journalists write their stories, but once they have written the story that then goes into the intellectual property, if you like, of their organisation, whether it is the TV station or the newspaper. Not only the story, but any photo they might have taken goes with it. It is all then the property of the Courier-Mail. It then gets regurgitated 12 months or two years down the track in ways you would never have imagined. Those of you who paid any attention to the weekend's paper might have seen something which caused great hilarity in my home. It was an advertisement for the Sunday Mail and the survey they were carrying out of the views and ideas of Queenslanders. To illustrate the advertisement for the Sunday Mail, the Courier-Mail used a map of Queensland and inside the map of Queensland was a photograph of me, a photograph of John Howard, two syringes and some gambling chips. This was not the kind of company that I thought I would end up keeping. It caused a great deal of concern. My mother thought what was a nice girl like me doing in a photograph like that. But it is that sort of thing that you have no idea it is even going to be there and you open up the paper on Saturday morning and you think, "My God! What is this?" Those sorts of incidents can really highlight the fact that you have lost control of even your own life at times.

I just want to add a couple of final things. Bill was talking about the caricature of the archetypal press gallery journalist. I have to say, they are not like that so much these days, Bill, but I do not know that it would be fair to say that people like Tony Koch have lost all elements of it. My staff and I, at our Christmas party last year, thought it would be fun to get out some interesting videos. We got out a video of Andrew Carroll's couple of pieces of Peter Beattie's In The Arena. For those of you who can remember, Today Tonight did a series of pieces on Peter Beattie's book In The Arena, in which Peter played himself. I think he is much better being a politician than an actor. But there is an outstanding interview in it where Tony Koch is interviewed as a slightly younger journalist than he is now. It is a mark of how much the times have changed that Tony smoked throughout the whole interview. He is being interviewed by Andrew Carroll and he smokes the whole time. I do not think even Tony would even think about doing that now.

On the subject of the Premier, I think he is a great example of how difficult it is in politics. One of the most vexed questions for me is: what is too much and what is too little in the way of coverage of the stories about what Government is doing that you are trying to get out there? Whether it is in Government or in Opposition, you are constantly trying to tell the public about what you are doing and your ideas about what is happening. There is always a decision to be made about, "How many press releases can you put out in a day?" I think the Premier's touched

on that when he put his hand up and said, "Yes, I am a media tart. I am the Premier of Queensland. What else would you expect?" It is certainly a question that we debate in my office on a regular basis—not whether Peter Beattie is a media tart. There is no debate about that.

I thought I would leave the last word about politicians and journalists to W. B. Yates who, in one of his poems called *The Old Stone Cross*, wrote a verse that goes like this—

"A statesman is an easy man
He tells his lies by rote
A journalist makes up his lies and takes you by the throat
So stay at home and drink your beer and let the neighbours vote"

Mr PETER WEAR: Paul, Minister and members of the society, thanks for the invitation to talk tonight. I can only really talk about television journalism. I am biased a bit towards the ABC, where I at various times hosted, reported and produced *This Day Tonight*, *Nationwide* and the *7.30 Report*. Anna really, you will be pleased to know, has taken about the top five minutes off what I was going to say. She has done it by referring whenever she spoke about journalism in her career from 1995 to only print journalism. She spoke about journalists who write stories, about photos, about writing and about readership. What I noticed, of course, is that she did not mention television. I would suggest that since about that time in this State there has either, you can say, not been any television journalism or what there has been is so inconsequential that it easily escaped Anna Bligh's attention. I wonder, Anna: have you ever been in a television studio debate or a protracted television studio interview?

Ms BLIGH: Once, in Opposition.

Mr WEAR: Yes, once. The point I am making is how much the context in which journalism has taken place has changed in the last half a dozen years. If I had been giving this talk six years ago and I had asked a Minister in Anna's position that question, she would have said, "Of course. Last week and the week before and the week before that."

That is what I would like to talk about. I cannot say too much about the relationship, I suppose, except to say that it is now largely non-existent. This started about 1994, by which time the commercial current affairs programs had already decided, through ratings and surveys, that people did not want to hear about politics and they did not want to sit and watch television at night and watch politicians. The ABC woke up to this at about the same time. It did nothing about it for a little while. One of the reasons it did not was that Queensland has always been an exception. At a point when current affairs were falling off and interest in politicians and politics was falling off, here in Queensland our *7.30 Report*, as it was then, was still rating very well. But elsewhere in the country, every time politics and politicians came on nightly current affairs programs, the ratings dropped. It is worth saying a brief bit about ratings.

Newspapers, of course, know what their circulation is, but they carry dozens or scores of stories, so they do not know exactly which ones are appealing or are not appealing; whereas the ratings science is now sufficiently accurate in television that you can actually pick the story that caused people to turn off, and you have the ratings next morning to prove it.

So the ABC made its decision in 1995 that, as far as the most significant discussion of politics was concerned, in all the States it would be closed down. The *7.30 Report*, the main vehicle for current affairs, would retreat to Sydney and it would concentrate on the Federal issues out of Canberra. The promise was made at the time, of course, that the antics of politicians and politics up here would continue to be reported if they were interesting enough. But there is an obvious catch-22 to that. When you are running a national program and something interesting happens in Queensland politics, you do not report it for Queenslanders; you report it for everybody else in Australia, which means, of course, that you have to dumb it down so that somebody in Adelaide or Perth can get the hang of a polity they know nothing about. In its own home State, the story simply looks naive and late.

So everybody really, since about 1995, in this city has abandoned that kind of forum. It is just worth recalling that that ended a 20-year tradition. Before the *State 7.30 Report* and its predecessors, the Premier of the State, the Opposition Leader—people from all different levels of Government; local, State, and so on—would tramp in and out of the television stations, both at

Toowong and at Mount Coot-tha, as a matter of course every day of the week. I suspect, Minister, that if you were to turn up tonight at the television reception area at the ABC, assuming there still is one, they would not know who you are.

Looking at some of the things we have lost because of that having happened, I started to make a little bit of a list. I do not know which is the chicken and which is the egg in this case, but I wondered if it could be that the rising public disdain, disgust and now disinterest in politics dates from the withdrawal of the television networks providing those strong local forums for political discussion and debate. It seemed to me extremely ironic that one year after the ABC closed down its ability to report in that way in Queensland, Pauline Hanson rose up. When you think that one of the many bandwagons she rode on was greater political accountability, it is even more ironic that the device we had in the ABC for providing that had already been shut down. Television journalists here had the rather galling business of watching southern television journalists coming up here, clumsily and quickly trying to understand a phenomenon which we understood far better than they did. But, of course, we did not have anywhere we could talk about it.

It is a terrible shame that somebody didn't say, "So what? If people have gone off politics on television, why can't we do them better or why can't we do them differently? Or why can't we simply bite the bullet and say, 'This is what television journalists are for.'?" In the case of the ABC, incidentally, it happens to be what their charter demands they do.

So the situation we have now is that, neither on Mount Coot-tha nor at Toowong, nor anywhere else in this State, is there any capacity or interest to report politics in that way. There is no TV chair or TV studio where a Kerry O'Brien or an Andrew Olle or a Quentin Dempster or a Jane Singleton or a Pam Bornhorst or a Maxine McKew can sit there with a camera focused on a politician and ask them questions. There is no likelihood that it will happen in the long-term future.

Other losses are pretty obvious, too. The half dozen most experienced and knowledgeable journalists in current affairs locally were lost to the ABC. The place was gutted of memory. It was gutted of an investigative culture and simply of the excitement and impetus that a good program spreads around the corridors of a place. We lost an immediate and impactful place, not just for the politicians but for comment on politics, and a good stable of TV commentators, he says looking fixedly at Dr Paul Reynolds, and people like him. They virtually disappeared overnight.

We have lost the one thing that television I believe does better than newspapers. It puts people on the spot. It makes them accountable and visible in special ways. I can remember various ways we used to exploit that. As I was writing that, I could not help thinking of Doug Tooth, who was a Health Minister some years ago. There was some crisis, as always, in Health and we were trying to get him on the program, which I think was Nationwide back in those days, and he refused to come on. So we started putting an empty chair in the television studio every night and we would ask the empty chair the questions we were going to ask Doug Tooth. It then transpired that somebody said, "What Doug Tooth really hates is being called Douglas Tooth, and what he hates even more is being called Seymour Douglas Tooth." Being the young, polite, respectful people that Bill has talked about, on the fourth night we tried calling him Douglas Tooth and on the fifth night calling him Seymour Douglas Tooth and he came in at 5 o'clock that evening and did an interview.

We have lost immediacy. We have lost some of the excitement and theatre. I know that the sort of blazing rows on cameras and the walk-outs and the shouting matches and all the ballyhoo that sometimes used to surround studio television might not add much to the debate, but it sure as hell reminded people that there was a debate, that there was something to debate. I think the removal of that from what is available on television is in some ways analogous to removing question time from the parliamentary day.

The reporting of the Fitzgerald inquiry, Tony has already mentioned. I think, even from a Courier-Mail point of view, he would agree that the way the local 7.30 Report reported Fitzgerald was very commendable. Compare it now with CJC inquiries that come and go with nothing but television news reports, which inevitably trivialise what is happening: they are bereft of any nuance or flavour and they are generally outclassed by the reporting in the newspaper the following morning.

We have also lost, I think, a sense of the context of Queensland politics and its history and its immediate past, which television actually was very good at conveying—the background, the history. I have heard from an acquaintance that a first-year politics tutorial at one of our universities occurred recently where the tutor was talking about an individual. He started to realise about halfway through the tutorial that none of the first-year politics students had heard about the individual he was talking about, and the individual was Joh Bjelke-Petersen, which makes you think.

Dr REYNOLDS: They're spelling his name wrongly in essays now.

Mr WEAR: They know who he is?

Dr REYNOLDS: Only because they listen to my lectures.

Mr WEAR: I suppose particularly apposite to this group is that I think it has changed the reporting of Parliament. Television programs had just one advantage over the newspapers, which was that their programs went to air in the evening. So if there was something to be said, it was the one occasion where they could get in and broadcast in the evening before the Courier-Mail could say it the next day. So part of the current affairs television round: whenever Parliament was sitting a reporter would come down to Parliament; by about 2 in the afternoon that reporter would be phoning back and saying, "I think this is the main issue of the day." A second reporter would then start putting together a television package which backgrounded that issue. Whoever was the compere and interviewer would start constructing the interview that was going to be used that evening. So as a matter of course you would get that night a fairly strong pictorial backgrounder on what the main State parliamentary issue was that day. You would then get the reporter who had been at Parliament who would do a piece to camera full of quotes as to what had been said, and then you would normally get a studio interview or a studio debate which tossed the issues around. That has now completely gone. It is interesting that memories are so short that I think a lot of people do not even realise that it has.

What is left is television news. Television news is well and good, but its very nature demands that it is a kind of a sausage factory. So what happens is that when a big issue comes along, it is not geared up to produce, if need be, investigative reporting or thorough reporting or whatever. Particularly a commercial news producer would die at the suggestion that, for example, the current CJC inquiry was to be given more than a minute and a half or two minutes on the program. He or she would not countenance that happening on a television news program.

So I probably cast a fairly negative view of the relationship between the kind of television I used to do and politicians by saying that it does not exist. I did cast my mind back across the years. I suppose, the general truism would be that politicians in Government distrusted us, which I think is exactly the way the relationship should be. I am sorry, Bill; we are different on that. I think healthy distrust and a degree of respect but not too much—there was never much on either side—is good. You also have to remember that my entire career in television journalism was in the Joh years, when he thought that everybody who worked in the ABC was a Left Wing scumbag and despised him. I will leave you to assess whether he was correct.

Dr REYNOLDS: Thank you, Peter, Anna, Bill and Tony. I am bound to say, since you raised Sir Douglas Tooth—Bill, as one of his colleagues, will probably have a different view—that if there is a legacy to Sir Douglas Tooth, former member for Ashgrove, it is the completion of the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of St John the Evangelist. In fact, Doug Tooth was the one who got behind that and indeed started the plan to complete the cathedral, which some parishioners of the Anglican Church regard as the last great medieval obscenity. However, that is to be decided in another forum.

We have heard four excellent addresses from quite different perspectives, clearly. We have a maximum of three-quarters of an hour for comments and questions and observations. Lest you think the vandals are at the gates of Rome, may I tell you that there is a Youth Parliament going on in the Chamber down the road. It is even worse and more vulgar and vile than the real thing. That is how we are training the apprentices. They said to me as they were filing in, as I was showing the two young ladies who blundered in here not knowing difference between an upper and a lower chamber, "We going to kiss ass." I don't know, Anna, but that is where they are coming from. Andrew has the roving mike, so if you would like to ask a question or make a comment and direct it to one of the four speakers or to all of them, that is fine. First, if

any of the speakers want to respond to the other speakers, they can have 10 minutes to do that if they wish.

Mr HEWITT: I am bound to say that Peter makes me very despondent because he reminds us of things that have been allowed to ebb into the past. That is a matter of great regret. Just trying to find something positive, I think Lateline on the ABC is quality, but far too late. Jammed between the interminable advertisements on a Sunday morning I think Business Sunday is quality television. My personal radio spot of the week—as good a reason as any to get away from Macca on a Sunday—is the 9 o'clock national radio briefing. I think that is quality radio and I would commend it to anyone who chooses to listen to it.

I would just like to talk a little bit more about the politician and the media and where public sentiment will always flow. I recall an interview that Wayne Goss did as Premier with Catherine Job. I have tried to access the interview. I am sorry, I have not been able to get access to it. I am not even sure of the issue, but I think it related to a union matter. Catherine interviewed the Premier. She put certain hypotheses forward, and each time Goss challenged her—the basis of her hypothesis. It was a vigorous interview. It was nothing like a Hawke/Charlton, blood-on-the-floor interview—Goss didn't need to do that—but it was a very fine one. Sitting in my lounge room, I was applauding the Premier of the day for taking the battle to the journalist—not conceding any point but responding in a fulsome way. I thought, really, "That is great television." I enjoyed that tremendously. I was very much impressed with the Premier of the day.

These days I work from my home and I suppose I am a bit of a radio junkie, because I listen to open line and commentaries and all that sort of stuff while I am working. The next morning at 8.30 on the ABC, people were falling over each other to talk about the Catherine Job/Wayne Goss interview. There was not one kind word for the Premier and, as I recall, even the secretary of an ALP branch phoned in to heap his criticism upon the Premier. I have always looked back on that as an incredible moment. One can say that we are very cynical to say that politicians cannot win, but my own judgment was that Goss performed well. He certainly did not deserve that level of totally negative criticism. I think in many ways you could look at that interview and say, "Can a pollie ever win?" Wayne Goss certainly didn't win. I think the only vote he got was mine.

Dr REYNOLDS: Tell them the sequel.

Mr HEWITT: You tell them. I don't know it. You might even recall the precise detail.

Dr REYNOLDS: I remember your discussing it with him.

Mr HEWITT: There is another thing I would like to talk about very briefly. During the height of the maritime dispute a couple of years ago Jennifer Byrne was sitting in for Kerry O'Brien for one week. She interviewed Peter Reith. Reith is big enough, old enough and ugly enough to look after himself. But Jennifer Byrne was focused on answers that she wanted to her questions and Reith, quite clearly, was not going to give them to her. The woman went ballistic. She became hysterical. If I had any input into schools of journalism, I would respectfully suggest that they run that interview and show it to students as the worst possible example of how you don't conduct an interview. The ABC obviously disagreed with me, because she is now a foreign correspondent.

Dr REYNOLDS: I have heard Bill tell that story about Wayne Goss' interview before. I agree with him. I don't recall the interview, but I can imagine similar instances. However, when we had our conference in July and Wayne Goss, Mike Ahern and Llew Edwards opened it, Bill talked to Wayne informally about that and Wayne couldn't remember anything of it at all. I don't know whether that is selective memory or whether Bill is on a wavelength that other people aren't on. Do any of the other speakers care to respond? No? Well, it is your turn, ladies and gentlemen. Trying to ignore the dogs at the gate.

Dave Ambrose: You said before that the journos watch the politicians. Who watches the journalists?

Ms BLIGH: There are all sorts of apparatus set up to police the ethics of journalists, but my observation over recent times is that if they ever had any teeth they do not seem to have any now and I am not sure they ever really had any. It seems that the only people who really watch journalists are other journalists—journalists who aspire to a long-term career in parliament or in politics within their own organisation or who want to progress. It is a pretty ruthless environment

and certainly journalists who are acting unethically or unscrupulously or just lazily certainly become public knowledge. I hear it around the gallery. They will talk about each other. It is not infrequent for people to fall out of the gallery for those sorts of sins.

It seems to me that that is the only check on the profession in a real sense. There are all sorts of bodies you can complain to—Media Watch and others. I think Media Watch is more effective than—I can't even think of the names of the various bodies that you can make complaints to about the press gallery: the Press Council and others. If there is something they like as much as commenting on politicians it is actually commenting on each other and each other's work. That is my observation and that seems to have the desired effect.

Mr KOCH: There is a Press Council. I do not think members of the public would generally go there. There is also the MEAA, our union, which has a disciplinary body.

Ms BLIGH: There is a law of defamation.

Mr KOCH: As Anna has said, the law of defamation is the one we are most frightened of. Media Watch can cause a bit of embarrassment for a night or two, but if you get a defamation action against you, that can really put a stop to your career.

Dr REYNOLDS: I think probably the answer to that is that most professions regulate themselves, with one or two exceptions. That is really a wider question for the society. Should lawyers regulate themselves? Should academics regulate themselves? Should doctors regulate themselves? These are cutting edge questions. But you cannot expect politicians and parliaments to legislate on that until there is some consensus coming through from the community about that. It is a very good question and it is one that, when Peter Beattie was the chair of the PCJC, was constantly being asked about the CJC, which was then in its infancy. Who guards the guardians? I would submit that over the last decade that has become, with respect of the CJC, an even more important question than it was 10 years ago when the CJC started out.

Andrew Timperley: I have a question for Peter. He talked about current affairs television journalism—the programs not being on any more in Brisbane. Does he think it is likely that they may return one day? I am sure I have seen reported in the press recently that certain State Governments and the ABC may be discussing funding for the ABC on the basis that there may be some more reporting of State Government issues. Does Peter or anybody else have any comment on that?

Mr WEAR: Yes, I read that, that Jonathan Shier has been going around the State Premiers. Whether somebody has just extrapolated that from his visit or not, I find it an astonishing and awful concept, if it is true, that the head of the ABC is hawking around the State Governments saying, "How about you put in a couple of million and you can have your very own current affairs show." I would be interested to hear the comments of politicians speaking from their hearts and their heads as to whether they, first, wanted that sort of program back again to make their lives even more difficult than they already are and, second, whether they would be prepared to sell it as a good way of spending taxpayers' money.

Ms BLIGH: I was just reminded that Queensland has its own special history of Government inspired TV programs. I remember as a young girl sitting on Sunday nights watching Queensland Unlimited. I certainly would not be a proponent of going back to those days. I might just comment on some of the things Peter said earlier, though. I agree that at the moment as a politician, as a Minister, I feel like the only serious analytical scrutiny of what I am doing is occurring in print journalism. I am very aware of the readership numbers. It may be that not many people are reading it, but I feel that the journalists from the Courier-Mail who are the political journalists around the place down here are certainly the only people who are paying ongoing attention to an issue in my portfolio. But if you asked me even two years ago, I would have, I think, given much more discussion about radio. Even as recently as 18 months or two years ago, ABC Radio in that 8.30 to 9.30 slot was very serious current affairs. It was the only time not only that I felt under scrutiny but also that I was forced to debate with people, stakeholders in the portfolio, perhaps the Opposition spokesperson or someone from the Uniting Church on an issue around welfare funding or an issue like that, I guess for a whole range of reasons—mostly, it seems to me, to do with just constantly changing personnel. You had Anna Reynolds for a long enough time and Caroline Tucker for long enough for them to actually develop and have some memory about the portfolio, like, "You were on six months ago and you said this about the Forde

inquiry and now you are saying that." That's not there. It is not impossible for them to develop it again, but it has not been there for at least six months. So what little scrutiny I was under from radio is certainly non-existent at the moment. While it is convenient, I don't think it is healthy.

Andrew Timperley: The Minister might recall that there was a bipartisan motion of the Parliament that was passed that deplored the loss of that 8.30 timeslot as well.

Dr REYNOLDS: When the ABC changed the format there was that, too. They did return to that, but they have changed the commentators so often that Anna is right: there is just no continuity. Bill, do you think in your day in the Parliament, until 1983—you were a Minister and so on—how do you think they stack up now with the media scrutiny as to then? Would you care to comment and make a comparative comment about that? As you say, as somebody who keeps following it now but who was part of it then, is there anything you could say about that?

Mr HEWITT: I think there was a level of camaraderie between the reporters and politicians. I can recall Keith Friday, who was a gentleman. I think Keith could even give young members a bit of homely advice—knock them around a little bit. There was Peter Trundle, who was the ultimate professional but a real oxymoron—a journalist who did not drink. Those things just did not add up. I have already mentioned the Courier-Mail by virtue of its great use of freedom of information. It breaks the ground first of all without going to people. I think there is a change. I think there is a high level of professionalism. Politics is less personalised. When I was around, if you made a reasonable speech you lived in the hope that you might get a mention in the paper. But personal contributions to debates these days are no longer referred to.

Dr REYNOLDS: Well, it was a two-paper town. It was a morning paper and an evening paper. They were both out of the same stable, but there was more continuous reporting. There was Peter with the ABC, and for a while some of the commercial television stations tried to trail the ABC on that, too.

Mr HEWITT: I don't know if I could add much more than that.

Dr REYNOLDS: Are there any further comments or questions?

Unidentified Questioner: I just wonder how the television broadcasting of Parliament will affect the sort of debate we are having and whether that would contribute or take away from the media coverage that we have at the moment.

Dr REYNOLDS: Would the broadcasting of State Parliament as opposed to Federal Parliament make any difference?

Ms BLIGH: The broadcasting of question time began just after I was elected. It was one of the first motions of the House, where the Parliament had to resolve to allow cameras on to the floor of the Chamber in Queensland. So we have had live footage of those parliamentary question times only in the last four to five years. It certainly made, I think, members more aware of what they are saying and what they are doing. It does not necessarily mean that they behave better. You are very aware during that hour. They can come on the floor at other times, but they generally do not because it is not something they think they will want any news on. You know the TV cameras are there, so it affects everything from sitting up straight, not scratching your head too much and not falling asleep to being very careful about what you say. I do not know what it was like before that, but I think it is also the case that both sides of the House play up to the cameras, play up to what is going to be the grab on the news. More and more you are thinking in terms of, "How can I say this complicated, difficult thing or how can I address this complex question in 30 seconds and say it in a way that will capture the attention of the news reporter so that it will get onto the news and at least my point of view will get some air time?" I think that is the effect it has on the people in the Chamber while it is actually happening.

It is not so much the cameras being there. It is about where that footage goes. It conditions what you say and how you say it and how you behave in front of the cameras. I concur with what Peter has said. That is, nothing that you say in here is ever going to get more than anywhere between 30 seconds to one and a half minutes. It means you start to think in sound bites. I do not think that is a healthy way for some of the most difficult and complex legal questions or program or policy issues to be intellectualised. Certainly there is a bit more air time on TV of what happens in the Federal House. I am not sure that it gets watched very much, or has any more of an effect, on people in the Federal Chamber.

Dr REYNOLDS: I would like to make two quick comments about that question. One is that one of Anna's ministerial colleagues said to me and to the student group I bring through Parliament as part of my course once a year, "Question time is sort of like the grand final. Both teams stoke themselves up." The other thing—this isn't appreciated—is that about the time that motion was passed by the Queensland Parliament Standing Orders was changed about question time so that questions were limited to one minute and ministerial replies were limited to three minutes, which meant it was a much snappier hour than it used to be, when Ministers would just read large, discursive replies that had nothing to do with the question. Tony will remember that question time just bored everybody rigid. It's still a very choreographed and stage managed thing because the Whips always hand out the questions. Ministers know from their side what the questions are. Therefore they know what the answers are. "I congratulate the member for asking the question. I know she is very interested in that issue"! Within those constraints, it is much more an interchange situation than it was. Tony, perhaps you might like to comment on then and now.

Mr KOCH: I think you are right. It is a lot better now. There was an hour given to question time back even 10 or 15 years ago, but it included a lot of procedural stuff. I think Peter Wear made a great contribution to understanding things tonight. Fifteen years ago there were actually three daily newspapers—the Daily Sun, the Telegraph and the Courier-Mail. The Australian was active. There were two Sunday newspapers. There was current affairs on two commercial channels—7 and 9—and then, as Peter said, the 7.30 Report.

The most dreadful thing that has happened to political reporting in Queensland is the restriction in the media—the passing of those papers and in particular those television shows. We can come up with a serious talk here or, conversely, a politician from any side, a member of the public or a member of the judiciary can come up with an important issue. Sure, the Courier-Mail might carry it. We might even run features on it. Take, for instance, the current Shepherdson inquiry. We are running usually a page 1 story and a full page inside. There might be a leader and a comment on it as well. That is the only analysis of that inquiry, which is a really important happening in Queensland. It has the potential—I do not think its potential will be realised—to bring down the Beattie Government. It is getting no extensive analysis or coverage from electronic media because they just do not exist here. The southern papers are not interested. If the Shepherdson inquiry was being held in Sydney, Melbourne or Canberra—anywhere in the Bermuda triangle—it would be different. There are 230 journalists in the gallery down there and they are fighting for a story like hyenas on a carcass, but it doesn't happen here. You could have the most sensational, real story here in Queensland and unless it has got what we call southern legs it is of no interest at all. It is a really sad thing because it makes Queensland the backwater that it does not deserve to be.

I must say, just on the other side: things are better, but this Parliament next week is going to vote on and carry legislation where this Government supports jailing journalists for interviewing prisoners without first getting the permission of the director-general of the department. So in some instances we have not moved forward a whole lot. That is the most regressive legislation I have heard of here in 20 years.

Dr REYNOLDS: It was said in the early Christian church that the blood of martyrs were the seed bed of the church. You may reflect on that, Mr Koch. As you are jailed, so will your profession flourish.

Unidentified Questioner: Are the matters of Cabinet subject to scrutiny by the media or is it a closed area and they only release what they want from Cabinet?

Ms BLIGH: It is a vexed question. I will tell you the theory and then I will tell you the practice. The theory is that, no, what happens in the Cabinet room happens in confidence and the submissions that are made to Cabinet and the minutes of the Cabinet are confidential and secret at all levels of Government. We actually take an oath to honour that. However, those records then become available to members of the public 30 years after they have been recorded. They become available on New Year's Day, so you will see—particularly at a Federal level more so than at a State level—stories in newspapers in January. January is a particularly good time to be poring over old Cabinet minutes. There might not be other news happening. You will see some interesting things come out about Cabinet deliberations. So that is, I guess, what happens with the actual documents of the Cabinet.

In terms of the media and the public finding out about what happens in Cabinet, that is something that Governments try to influence and control. Generally what happens is that the Premier will hold a press conference after Cabinet. Obviously Governments have an interest in telling the public all the good news out of Cabinet. So usually after Cabinet there is a press conference and the Premier will make announcements, or the relevant Minister will make an announcement. But it is possible that at a Cabinet meeting we might resolve six pieces of legislation. You would not deal with all of that in one press conference, so you might pick the biggest and the best and do it on Monday and then announce something later on that week, or you might bring it up in Parliament or you might even hang on to it. You might have decided it but not announce it for two weeks because it happens to fit with a particular event. Obviously Governments of any political persuasion have an interest in making sure that they get the best opportunity to tell people about the good things that they are doing.

You will not be surprised to know that Cabinet does not just talk about good news. The submissions to Cabinet are, generally speaking, good news in the sense that they are about legislative reforms. It may not be reforms that, as you have heard, everybody agrees with, but they are news that the Government wants to get out and talk about.

It is also the case that Cabinet talks about things that are a problem for the Government from time to time. Those things, of course, will be minuted quite sensitively. But in 30 years time there are interesting Cabinet minutes about what things have been discussed and what was resolved about them. Many of those issues are never aired in public. I do not imagine that that is going to change.

In practice it pretty well happens like that, but I think you have probably all seen that newspapers particularly, but sometimes other media outlets, get Cabinet leaks. They may have got those leaks as a submission progresses through to Cabinet. A submission might be prepared by my department, for example. It is prepared on a confidential basis and there are different levels of security for Cabinet submissions. But in order for it to be prepared there would be at the least 10 public servants in my department who would have been part of writing it, reading it, checking it and submitting it for my consideration and my ultimate approval for it to go ahead to Cabinet. Then it goes into the Cabinet bag. That means that it goes out to every other Minister's office. They then send it out to a select group of people in their own department to brief them. Does this proposal from Anna Bligh have an effect on the police portfolio? Tom Barton will ask his legislative and policy branch to give him a brief about the effect on the police of any proposal I might have. And that happens in every department. So certainly there are a number of public servants who see the document on the way through. I think the majority of public servants are trustworthy, committed people, but it is not an unknown phenomenon for a submission to find its way into the media or the public realm at that stage, before it even gets to Cabinet or immediately after Cabinet, because of that process.

It is also not unusual for Governments to have players around the Cabinet table who sometimes have different agendas from the Premier of the day or the Minister who is bringing a proposal forward. Those people might take it upon themselves to bring certain matters to public attention, against the wishes of the rest of the Cabinet. That is politics, basically. So that happens from time to time—probably not as often as journalists would like, perhaps. There is nothing better than getting a Cabinet leak, is there, Tony?.

Mr KOCH: A lovely, fresh one.

Ms BLIGH: A lovely fresh one he likes. So that is what happens. That is the way it works. I actually think it is a good indicator of when a Government is in trouble when you start to see lots of leaks from Cabinet consideration in the media. I think that is a good indicator that a Government is falling apart, frankly. You can certainly track that happening to various Governments at both a State and Commonwealth level, because it generally means the bureaucracy is losing confidence in that Government or the bureaucrats honestly believe that things that are happening are wrong and make a judgment about bringing that to public attention, and/or the solidarity that should exist around the Cabinet table has broken down into tribal groups.

Dr REYNOLDS: I would like to introduce you to Damon Blake, who is the Treasurer of the chapter. I am asking Damon if he would move a vote of thanks to our speakers and also give us a brief commercial.

Mr BLAKE: Thank you, Paul. I just wanted to say a few brief words about our current membership. I know that most of the faces I see here are current members of our chapter, but I am just hoping that those people who might find that they are inclined to perhaps join the Australasian Study of Parliament Group or who have not as yet renewed their membership might like to. I have some forms with me which you could take home with you with the address of our secretary, Sarah Lim, who is at the back there. You could then, at a further date, send those in. As Paul mentioned, our finances are extremely good at the moment, but they are only such not just because of the fact that we hosted a very successful conference this year but also because of the ongoing commitment of our very enthusiastic members over the last few years.

That commercial over, I would like to thank the Honourable the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, Anna Bligh; Mr Bill Hewitt; Mr Tony Koch; and Mr Peter Wear, for their interesting and stimulating conversations tonight. I hope you have found them as enjoyable and as interesting as I did. I hope that you will join me in the usual way in thanking them.