



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

*Role of the Speaker:
Views and reflections by
former Speakers*

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The meeting commenced at X.XX p.m.

Mr FOURAS: Can I say how pleased I am to be speaking at an ASPG function on the role of the Speaker and also how delighted I am to have former Speaker Neil Turner to join me in giving our views on the role of the Speaker. When I first attended parliament—in fact, the first day—Tom Burns asked me whether I noticed that the Speaker nodded at the government and nodded at the opposition and said a prayer. He wanted to know whether I understood why he did it, and he said, 'It is easy; having looked at the government and having looked at the opposition, the Speaker was praying for the people.'

Originally, of course, the parliament was there to enact the King's legislation and to raise the King's taxes. So in the early days, the Speaker was chosen by the Crown and was basically a messenger from the parliament to the Crown. Of course, that is why we have the situation where Speakers are supposed to resist being taken to the chair after being elected. In fact, on many occasions they are actually dragged screaming to the chair, because a substantial number of them actually did lose their heads. There was the example of one Speaker who was actually locked up in the London Tower for daring to criticise one of the King's ministers.

So there was a gradual development of the role of the Speaker from being that of a messenger to being the person who was there to protect the dignity and authority of the parliament. We still have some anachronisms that go back to those original ideas, for example, when we go into Committee of the House of the Whole in our parliament, it was a way of getting rid of the King's man, the Speaker. So when you discuss the King's legislation clause by clause and even amendments to it, you would not have done that. So we now have a Chairman of Committees who actually sits in the chair when the House looks at the bill and is able to amend it.

During the War of the Roses, there were four Speakers who actually lost their heads. So we have the tradition now where the Speaker reluctantly goes to the chair. In fact, you are supposed to be very unwilling. There were times in those days when Speakers were actually taken screaming to the chair. But if we go through the development of the role of the Speaker from messenger to one who is about protecting the dignity and authority of the parliament, then you would actually seize some of that history. For example, the most famous of Speakers was that man for all seasons, Sir Thomas More, who was Speaker at the time of Henry VIII. Cardinal Wolsey, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, went to him asking that the parliament pass a bill that would put a massive tax on the people to fight the French. Of course, if you remember Magna Carta, that was when, in spite of it being the King's legislation, it was the King's money, you also had to get the authority of parliament to do that.

So we went through this process where we had Charles I riding his horse into the House of Commons. The Speaker leapt to his feet. The King was demanding the names of the five members who dared criticise their King in the chamber. One of them was Cromwell. He said that he could not oblige his King. He had eyes and ears to do only as the House directed him. It was one of the first major statements about the importance of the Speaker protecting the authority of the parliament and the rights of members. At that time, of course, those five members were rowing across the Thames for their dear lives. The House of Commons is right there.

So we went through that process. It all finished with the civil war and the Bill of Rights in 1688. That is when, through the blood and carnage of an horrendous civil war, three fundamental aspects of parliament actually came into being. One, of course, was that legislation had to be binding on the Crown as on the citizens and the power of the purse—that parliament said where money was to be spent, not the King. Also important was the concept of privilege—parliamentary privilege—the right of members to say or do whatever they would inside the House without anybody having a right to take them to court. I will speak a little bit more about parliamentary privilege later.

When I became Speaker, as an ex-footballer of both Rugby League and Rugby Union—and we have a referee over here—I saw the role very much as that of a referee. Ultimately, I think any referee would tell you that the quality of the game, which I am talking about as parliament here, is only as good as the players. It is only as good as the capacity of players who want to respect the authority of the chair and the dignity of the parliament. The ball is getting dropped all over the place, off-side, foul language, or whatever—it can be a dreadful game—but quite often, of course, what one must accept as an ex-Speaker is that the Speaker has to cop the blame.

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So as we go through this process, we must understand one thing that is fundamental to our British system of parliament, that is, the system of responsible government. It does not mean that they behave responsibly; it means that the executive—the Premier and his or her cabinet—actually sit on the floor of the parliament. That is unlike Montesquieu's separation of powers that we have in some European countries like France and that we have in America where the executive—the Minister for Defence—are all outside of the parliament. There you have a parliament that is supposed to scrutinise the executive. We have an executive that is really quite all powerful. There is a great danger, of course, of the parliament becoming a very expensive rubber stamp the stronger the executive of the government of the day is.

I came to being Speaker after the Fitzgerald inquiry. When I was here in my early days, we had only one parliamentary committee and that was the Subordinate Legislation Committee. We actually looked at the orders in council, regulations and statutes that came through the Governor in Council rather than through the parliament. Of course, one must understand that, as Speaker, even when a parliament is prorogued, a dissent motion or any one of those things actually stands on the books until the next parliament meets. So the parliament has the right to supervise it. Having a committee to actually do that was quite useful. I was actually put on that committee when I was elected in 1977. I could not get off it. There were no extra fees for it. That says a bit about what happens to the motivation of members of parliament, if I can be blunt.

We all remember the furore that led to the split in the coalition in 1983 about the Public Accounts Committee. The only committee we had at that stage was a Public Accounts Committee. I do not want to take credit for it, but we came in with EARC recommendations for a new committee system and a very expansive one. So we had a number of committees, and that was a very big change.

I think over my time here the biggest change that we have seen has been to question time. When I first came here, it was quite weird really. You would get up on your feet and you would have to say to the Speaker, 'Mr Speaker, I ask a question with notice' or 'without notice'. You could do that at that time. What happened if it was on notice is that those questions went onto the notice paper for the next day. If you wanted to get information, sometimes the only way to do it was to put a question on notice, because if you asked a question without notice sometimes—as you would all understand here—you would get fobbed off. Although there are standing orders relating to a question to indicate that an answer must be relevant, succinct and the minister must not debate the issue, it is very difficult, as ex-Speaker Turner will tell you, to tell ministers what they can or cannot say; in fact, it is just impossible.

Some days you would have a number of questions on notice. I would barely get to a question without notice. You would get up and say, 'Mr Speaker, question No. 7 standing in my name', and the people in the public gallery would hear an answer written by the bureaucracy without knowing what the question was. So the whole idea of having questions on notice and question time being without notice was by far the most positive thing that I saw in my time as Speaker. Undoubtedly, question time is a time when you can hold the executive accountable, irrespective of concerns one might have about how ministers answer or do not answer questions. I think that was very important.

Although there were no time constraints when I was Speaker, I regularly sat down ministers who were waffling. Now we have a three-minute constraint. Quite often, you get these changes that are forced on governments. Everybody talks about the level playing field. When I became the Speaker, the Labor Party had this wonderful paper out about changing the parliament—talking about the level playing field. I had this thing in front of me and I was saying, 'Hey, what can I do with all these wonderful things? I am Speaker. I believe in them. I think they are great.' 'Stand back. We don't really believe in it in government; we just believe in it in opposition.' It is only when you get a situation where some Independents have control of the parliament that you get some major changes.

The other thing was the speaking times. I actually brought them down—in a motion before the House—from 30 minutes to 20 minutes. I would have brought them down to 10 if I had my way, and I would still recommend that now. I think that debates are talkfests. I think that parliaments are very expensive to run, they require a lot of resourcing, and I think that if you give people 20 minutes, they feel obliged to fill it. I have seen it in the United States. One of the good things about junketing is that you do get some good ideas because you actually see things in

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action. I must admit that I recommend junkets; somebody has to have them for their constituents, so why not the local member? Obviously he is a good guy, otherwise he—or she—would not be the local member.

Recently they have cut down the time for adjournment debate speeches to three minutes. I think that is great. In terms of time, we need to have more time for private members' statements. If you want my position on it, I think they are very important at the right end of town. You can actually really get heard then. Sometimes I am sitting in the chair as Deputy Speaker and as we get to the adjournment debate, we have 10 members with three minutes each. You start off with 10 members and in the end there is you and the last speaker and maybe the Government Whip. So that is really less than exciting.

I think that the matter of privilege, in my time, is the most abused word in our parliaments. You get people getting up now and saying, 'Mr Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising' and it is not a matter of privilege at all. It is more often than not about what somebody said. Let us be blunt about that. Socrates actually spent a lifetime trying to talk about the concept of what is the truth. He was one of the wisest men who actually gave us the concept of the common good. He said that happiness is the result of good deeds. He gave the world some wonderful things. He just said that it is too difficult. Imagine if you had the situation where the Speaker actually had to say what the truth was. Solomon was not that wise. Ultimately, privilege can be sustained only in that situation if you assert that someone deliberately misled the House, knowing that they did it. Of course, that is a serious contempt of the parliament. I think that too often we have matters of privilege being raised in the parliament. Quite often members should just be getting up making a personal explanation and they should be doing it at the right time under standing orders. That is my perception of it. I always had problems with people getting up at the end of question time and raising matters of privilege to score points.

The final thing I want to talk about that really distressed me in my time as Speaker was the notion of dissent motions against the Speaker's ruling. I said that we have come a long way from being a messenger to being somebody who is about running the parliament with authority. In fact, Chifley—and he is my favourite Labor politician—said that in the life of a democracy, it is not the party that is important but the parliament and anything that we do to destroy the dignity of that place delivers a death blow to democracy itself. That is the bottom line. I will just finish on the note that we do not really have people coming into this place as parliamentarians. They come here as politicians. There is a distinction there.

Nevertheless, I had nine dissent motions moved against me when I was Speaker. The first one was because at that time the opposition and the Liberal Party were not in coalition after the furore of the 1989 debacle for the conservative forces. I just decided that I would give the first question to the Leader of the Opposition and the second to the Leader of the Liberal Party. That was dissented against, so we had a dissent motion on that. We had a dissent motion for a member when a question had been asked of the chair of the PCJC. The standing orders are clear. You can ask a question of a chairman of a parliamentary committee but only if they are going to inquire into a matter or only, if they are going to report, when they are going to report on a matter. This question was about matters dealing with the CJC. I ruled it out of order. I had a dissent motion on that.

I had a dissent motion on editing of a question done by the table staff. I did not even see the question. I was accused of censoring the parliament because unseemly words, which you would have ruled out of order had you heard them in the chair, were ruled out of the question. I ruled a question out of order on a bill currently before the House, which we have now all the time. I was challenged because I thought, as Speaker, that on some bills which were very specific—and I gave the temporary chairs that direction—a minor amendment to a particular piece of legislation should not be an excuse to have a debate on, for example, the Department of Education. If it was that specific and that minor, I thought in those situations we should have relevance before the House. So I actually had a dissent motion moved against me because I decided that relevance was important to the parliament. It is interesting.

The point is that if you were in the House of Commons, for example, you would not get dissent motions moved against you, because they are not moved against the Speaker. For one thing, the Speaker can actually decide not to see a member. So if a member is being disagreeable, the Speaker might just send a message to that member saying, 'I will not see you for six months, so don't bother coming, Charlie.' They will not get the call. The Speaker in the

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House of Commons would not be given or accept a list from the Whips. He just exercises his or her authority—if we have a female Speaker—to do that. That is the first thing. So you would be very reverent to Mr Speaker, I am sure, under those circumstances, if he decided not to see you.

I was told when I was there that even if they disagreed with a ruling by the Speaker, they would have thought that Mr Speaker may have had a particular reason on that day to rule that way. They might go around and say 'We understand, Mr Speaker, you had a particular reason that day, but we would hope that down the road you would see it this way, because this is what May's rules of practice states.' Ultimately, I think what we need in some ways is to have a balance between politics and parliament. I think there has to be an understanding by members. It is very adversarial. It is adversarial by its very nature. It is the way that we sit in the chamber: the government versus the opposition. We are sitting right on top of each other.

When I was Speaker and had these silly notions about fairness, I would have Tom Burns—and I am sure that Tom would not mind me saying this—coming to me and saying, 'What are you on? I spent so many years here getting squashed and thrown out and kicked to death. How dare you talk about a level playing field! I want to be minister for retribution. I want to be minister for getting quits. I want to be the minister for getting even with the bastards. So don't you dare think that you can do anything different.' I am not going to talk about my differences with Goss. That may be something that might be written about down the road—maybe not. Maybe I will not write about it. I think that sometimes it is best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Ultimately, I think that the risk faced by a Speaker never comes from the opposition. When I was in the House of Commons and on other junkets—which I enjoyed on behalf of my constituents, might I tell you, and thank them very much for it—I was told a story of the young Tory who made his maiden speech and got up and unbelievably castigated the opposition—those socialists. Everything evil in the empire was as a result of them sitting in that chamber. He gave them a nice belt and sat down well pleased with himself. Margaret Thatcher was then Prime Minister. She came behind him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Young man, do you think that the opposition sits over there?' She said, 'Wrong. The one thing you learn in politics is that the opposition sits behind you.' Of course, that is what happened to Margaret Thatcher. She was never defeated by the Labor opposition.

So getting back to the point that I am making, the threat to the authority of the Speaker, the independence of the Speaker, the fair-mindedness of the Speaker—or whatever phrase one wants to use—always comes from the government side, because at times they want honed-down decisions. I remember the classic case when Mackenroth came to me. He stood up under standing order 142 and moved that the question be now put and sat down. I called some more speakers. Around in my rooms later he said, 'What the bloody hell are you doing?' I said, 'Next time come and consult me.' The standing orders are clear. They say that I have a discretion on the gag motion, and I was not going to use it.

I remember Goss absolutely spitting chips at me, because he suspended standing orders so that allegations being made during question time—straight after question time; it was very clever politics—by the opposition about corruption in the Goss government could be laid on the table in the parliament. He moved that and did not speak to it. I asked, 'Is there a seconder?' Tom Burns said, 'I second it.' He did not speak to it. Then I looked over to the other side, one speaker, Goss jumped, sat down; two speakers, Goss jumped; three speakers, Goss jumped; four speakers, Goss jumped and I called him. If you ever knew Wayne, the hair on the back of his neck was standing up. I said, 'Don't you understand? Had I called you after the first speaker, you would have closed the debate. You moved the motion.' It just really hit him that I was not going to close the debate by calling him. It is the same thing as sitting in the chamber now. It is quite often convenient if somebody is not there or quick to jump for a Speaker to call the minister in the second reading debate. That would be terribly wrong—terribly, terribly biased. You should be looking around and if he jumps and you see somebody there you say, 'Sorry, sit down. I call the member over there.'

The things that I would like to see would be, for example, a better use of the time—shorter speaking times—but also a business committee as they have in the Victorian parliament which would look at the legislation that is before the House and decide between all sides how much time should be allocated. What they do there is say, 'This week we have got six bills to go through the parliament. We have so many hours of sittings. So the hours are discrete.' I think it is ludicrous with the complexity of legislation that we have to deal with, where clauses are

in the hundreds in a bill, that we are saying that a member can get up and speak for 10 minutes, five minutes, five minutes—that a member can get up and speak three times to the tune of 20 minutes to each clause. Three, two and two would be more than adequate. Those two things go together. Thirdly, I think that we should have some process where maybe you do not have points of order or whatever during question time and have a time after question time when members can actually get up and say, 'Mr Speaker,' and take a point of order and just have some discussion and allow people to express their view.

I really liked that in the New Zealand parliament when I was there, when a point of order was taken, that before the Speaker, two or three people get up and put their point of view on the point of order. I thought that was a really good parliament. It made people just much more aware. I know that most of us come here in the parliament—and I did; I sat as a temporary chair in my last term and before that, I did not want to know the standing orders, because you might have to obey them. Believe it or not, I was actually quite fiery in my opposition days. I am just a gentle pussycat now.

That is the bottom line. Ultimately, I think that the Speaker actually is the person who sets the tone in a parliament, not just because we have nice gardens and he looks after the catering stuff, or whatever. He sets the tone. I think that is where it comes from. He or she is there to protect the interests of the members and to make sure that the members can function, can meet their responsibilities as legislators and hold the government accountable for its actions and the way it spends its money, and so on. It is a job that I never wanted. When I was in opposition for nine years, my passion was as shadow minister in the area of family services. My passion still is that sort of thing. But in the end, I was given the job to do, and I am not sure how well I did it. It is a challenging job. When you first sit there, you wonder whether you are going to fall out of the chair or not. I tell you what, it is frightening the first day. But in the end, it is a job which carries the history of the best system of government in the world, the system that we have in this parliament. Thank you for listening to me.

Mr TURNER: Past and present members of parliament, ladies and gentlemen: thank you for the invitation to be here this evening. When I first received the invitation I thought, 'To hell with it. I'm not going down there.' Then on reflection I thought, 'Well, perhaps they deserve me.' You have asked us to speak about the role of Speaker and some of the humorous stories and problems we had and that sort of thing. I have put a little bit of it down. I do not intend to go over a lot of the ground that Jim went over, but I concur with him. I will make some reference in relation to privileges later, but I would like to talk about the role of Speaker.

I refer to Winston Churchill. Of course, we all know Winston Churchill and some of his famous sayings. For example, when Lady Astor said, 'If you were my husband I'd poison you,' he said, 'If I were your husband I'd willingly take it.' One time in parliament—and this is a Speaker sort of a story—Will Paling from the opposition interjected on Churchill and said, 'You're nothing but a mongrel dog.' Members said, 'Oh, by Jove, that's unparliamentary. Mr Speaker, make him withdraw. He must withdraw.' Churchill said, 'Mr Speaker, I do not wish for him to withdraw that comment. All I ask is that he repeat it outside of parliament so I can show him what a mongrel dog will do to a paling.'

I have some recollections of some things. When I was the Speaker Terry Mackenroth was in opposition and alongside him was David Hamill. A minister was up doing a ministerial statement. He was about as exciting as a flat glass of lemonade. He was pathetic really. I will not name him. It was not loud, it was not rude and it was not an interjection, but I heard Mackenroth say to Hamill, 'I don't think he's dead. I think I just saw his lips move.' Another time Terry Sullivan—I used to call him motormouth; he would interject all the time—interjected on Mike Horan, the then Health Minister, who was speaking in a debate. Anyhow, Terry interjected, interjected, interjected and the minister said, 'You're a bloody fool.' I said, 'Order! Minister, that is unparliamentary and you will withdraw.' Terry Sullivan jumped up and the minister said, 'I withdraw.' Terry Sullivan still wanted to get his point of order in and so he said, 'If I am a bloody fool, I'm not as big a bloody fool as him.' I said, 'We won't have a division on that,' and the House broke out in uproar. Some of the Labor fellows came to me later and said, 'If you'd had a division on it, we'd have voted against him.'

There are many stories that one could tell and a lot that I cannot and will not tell, because I have some concerns in relation to the format of the meeting here. It is to be recorded by *Hansard*, but anyone could go away and repeat anything that I said. If it was something that was

derogatory to my own government at the time, I think it is better left alone. I do not intend to go through standing orders one by one. If you want to know what I think of the system, I will attempt to tell you. I do not wish to cast any aspersions—or do not intend to—or mean any criticism to past, present or future Speakers. I just hope that the things that I talk to you about might be of some benefit to you.

It has been my fervent belief that the parliament is the focal point of Queensland. We have ambassadors coming here, consuls, business delegations, members of parliament from all over the country and all over the world, and big business deals are done here. I definitely see the parliament as one of the focal points of Queensland. It is important that the parliament function as a parliamentary democracy, as Jim mentioned, and that it be a place such that the people who work here have a sense of pride in the building and in the whole operations of the parliament. I will touch very briefly on this issue without going into any of the details.

When I was first elected as the Speaker of parliament—it just happened, like Jim would tell you, like that; it was no surety that I would get it or anything—I said what a great honour it was and a privilege to be appointed as Speaker and that I was the representative of the parliament who dealt directly with the Governor who was the representative of the Queen—and you are, as Jim pointed out, the spokesperson for the parliament. He went back over the history, so I have no intentions of going over the history of the parliament. During my particular time—and this is not a 'I did this' or 'I did that' sort of thing; I am not trying to look for any kudos—I tried to make this place function as a fair and impartial parliament, giving equal fairness to opposition and to government members. Some government members said, as Jim mentioned, 'You should throw someone out to get better numbers.' I said, 'I'll throw no-one out unless they deserve to be thrown out.' I actually only threw one member out, and that was my friend Matt Foley. He brought it on himself one day, but I was not known for actually removing anyone from parliament.

It was my belief that if someone on one side was speaking and—pardon my French—someone in the opposition was to say, 'You're a bastard,' or something, to someone on the government side, I would say, 'That is unparliamentary. You will withdraw that comment immediately,' and they would. By the same token, if the following day someone made exactly the same comment from the government side, I would not pretend that I had not heard it. I would say, 'You will withdraw that,' if it was the Premier of the state or whoever it was. So I tried to be fair and impartial in those sorts of things. I tried to give advice to members irrespective of what their political beliefs were.

I had Labor members—and they will remain nameless—who came to me and said, 'Neil, I need to get a question on today, but the minister's going on and there's only three or four minutes left to go and it's important that I get a question up.' I would say, 'Is it really important to you?' If they said yes, I said, 'Go back and sit down and I will sit the minister down.' I would say to the minister, 'Wind up your speech,' and the minister would not, so I would say, 'Resume your seat. I call the honourable member for Bulimba,' or whoever it might have been at that time and they got their question on.

I think that the Speaker's role should be to see that the members of parliament operate in a democracy where they have the right to have their voice heard. They have been elected by the people. There were some women on both sides of parliament who never had a very strong voice and I made sure that they were not overridden by clowns who were interjecting at that particular time under threat of getting thrown out, because *Hansard* was there to record what was going on and I thought it was important that they should be heard.

I will not name people as I had intended to because of my fear of what might go back to somewhere and you get a question in parliament that I would not like to see brought up. But let us say that when I was first in parliament someone in a position of power and authority said to me when we were going to our first budget meeting—and I had not been long in; it was a matter of a month or something like that—'Times are tough and you're going to have to cut your budget. You're going to have to privatise the catering at Parliament House and you're going to have to hive off Corporate Services and it's going to be run by the executive,' and a number of other things.

I listened to it and they said, 'Would you like to say something now, Mr Speaker?' I said, 'Yes, I've got something to tell you and you're not going to like it.' They said, 'What's that?' I said, 'I happen to believe in the independence of this parliament and the separation of powers and

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you will not hive off Corporate Services to the executive. This is not the government of the executive. It's the government of the people and the government of the members, not the executive. So it will not go there. If you want to privatise catering, I'll tell you something: you're going to have to pay an allowance to every member and it will be like New South Wales where you owe \$1.5 million a year to the members to pay meal allowances and you're only paying \$500,000 or whatever it is to subsidise it.' I said, 'You can have what they have in Canberra, if you like, where they pay Hyatt Regent prices for Coles food, but it's not going to happen so just go away with you.' I think, as Jim correctly identified, they try it on you from whichever political side of the spectrum you might come from. But that basically is my main beliefs. I had wanted to say a few other things, but I will not.

I think the problem—and I do not know how you get around it; I do not pretend to know all of the answers—is that in the past, maybe the present and the future and across all party political lines unfortunately at times the Speaker can sort of become the lackey or beholden to the Premier of the day and they expect these things to be done. That puts a lot of pressure on. The Speaker should be fair and impartial, and I think in the main most of them have tried to be. I will not say it was my view because Jim would say that I was never that way inclined, but one could raise the question of whether we get service out of the CJC or the CMC. They have shifted the deck chairs around on the *Titanic*; that is all—that is, whether we would be better served by an upper house than a non-elected body that is answerable to no-one and is a star chamber. I have said that, and you can go back and get all my speeches. I have said it at estimates debates and everywhere and it cost me fairly dearly in my life. It cost me about three attempts by the CJC to lumber me with leaking documents to try to put me away, as some people in this room would even know at this present moment. I will not dwell on that, anyhow. I have sat ministers down on numerous occasions.

The media attacked us when I was the Speaker and said that we had members of parliament who were staying in their rooms for 12 months or more, and Jim would know who they were. They were not in my party. I just said, 'It's no business of yours. If the member wants to use his room or his office at any time of the day, night or weekends he's entitled to use it.' They also said that we should be paying for our accommodation there and our cheap meals should not be getting subsidised. So I called the media representative into my office and said, 'I'm going to tell you something. You pay the same price for your drink that we do in the bar with one difference: there's more of you mob drinking there and drinking well than there are members.' And it was; they were full all the time in there.

I said, 'You pay the same price for your food as we do, cooked by the same chef. You've got free telephones all around the parliament,' and there were a lot more in those days. A lot of them have been taken away, but there were free telephones everywhere that they could use. I said, 'You've got free rooms off the chamber and you've got free media rooms that you utilise in the parliament. If you work at it hard enough that you make it that we have to pay accommodation and lift all those fees, I'll give you one guarantee: you'll pay for every bloody square metre of accommodation that you've got here and you won't have any free phones or anything.' I never heard much more about it because they did not like to see their privileges, if you like, taken away.

When we talk about privileges, I concur with Jim. There are a lot of people getting up on points of privilege. Oh, it was pathetic at times. I had one fellow who used to do a fair bit of it. It will not matter if I name him—Dean Wells—will it? No-one knew this, but I had had enough. I talked to the Clerk and told him what I had in mind and he said, 'Yes, you can do it all right.' Lawrence Springborg got up and asked a question and once again up jumped Dean Wells on his feet. He must have muscles in his thighs like an American Negro 100 yard sprinter. He jumped up and took a point of order. He said that he should not be able to ask that question because of such and such. I said, 'That's a very valid point of order. I need time to reflect on it, so I now adjourn the parliament to the ringing of the bells,' and I just walked out. There were blokes milling around in there who thought that the parliament had been dissolved and come to an end. No-one knew what had happened.

I know he is going or gone now so I cannot do him much more harm, if you like, but I said to the Clerk, 'Come and have a cup of coffee.' He came in, we had a coffee and I said, 'Do you feel like another cup?' He said, 'Yes,' so we had another cup. We spent about a quarter of an

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hour in there. I said, 'What's the story with it?' He said, 'I'll get the book and have a look at what the ruling is on it.' He said, 'Oh, Wells is correct.' I was hoping he was wrong. So I came back in the House after it had resumed and said, 'Resume your seat. The point of order is valid. The next question.' Well, Springborg has never forgiven me even to this day. He reckons I made the biggest fool out of him you possibly could.

But there is one other issue of parliamentary privilege that I want to touch on, and that is privilege of the parliament for parliamentarians to expose corruption or whatever it might be or someone who is a shonky builder or whatever it is. I would hope that parliamentary privilege is never watered down or removed. Parliamentary privilege as such is most important, but with every privilege goes a responsibility—that is, the responsibility of the members to know their facts, and if they say something derogatory about someone or their family or their business that they have got their facts right. I do not like to see the media and people working on removing parliamentary privilege, because I think it is most important.

I had one particular occasion when I was Speaker that I did not particularly appreciate. My old father passed away when he was just 99 and his funeral was on a particular day and I had to go to it. I had to get leave, which was normal, because we had no majority. We had a nil majority that required me to vote as the Speaker to pass legislation. Peter Beattie had no problem giving me leave, so I went. When I came back my staff said to me, 'You've been done over properly in the parliament by some of the Labor people.' I said, 'Is that a fact? How's that?' Norm Alford from the Children's Commission had been down to see me the evening before and said that he was afraid of a raid from the CJC and he wanted me to secure some documents so that the CJC could not get their hands on them. I said, 'I can't do that, Norm. I can't do that sort of thing. Anyhow, they've got the right to raid anything since the legislation was put through.'

Nothing was done about it, but three or four Labor members got up and said that I lacked integrity, principle and character and they questioned my heritage, whether my parents were married and everything. They did a good job on me. I came back and got a copy of what they had said. I went around and talked to a couple of them. One of them turned around to me—he was over the other side there—and said, 'Oh, sorry about your father.' I said 'Yeah, what's sorry is that while I'm doing a eulogy on him you're in here tipping a bucket of muck over me.' He said, 'I didn't do that.' I said, 'Yes, you did. Go and tell your other two or three mates to be in here in another 20 minutes because I'm going to do you all over.'

And I did them over. I said that it was a pity that they never saw fit to come and ask me whether I had hidden anything because I could not, because these people had helped pass legislation that gave a body like the CJC the right to raid the parliament at any time or any member or any minister and take away anything they liked. I understand—and I could be wrong—that this is the only parliament in the world operating under the Westminster system that allows a body like the CJC to raid its parliament. I think that is hideous and insidious. I suggested then and I still suggest that it should be removed from the statute book. I could go on for a long time and make the hair grow on the back of your neck at some of the things they have done, but I do not intend to.

I saw in the—and it is no attack on the present Speaker; I just happened to see it the other day—1 November *Courier-Mail* where according to Parliamentary Library statistics members have delivered on average 4.5 more ministerial statements each sitting day than ministers in the coalition government in 1996. We were condemned a bit, but you people are whacking through four and a half more ministerial statements a day. I know there is a bit of criticism in that area. Anyhow, I do not intend to go on because you waffle on and it sort of becomes pretty stupid. I have a couple of little things to relate. I tore this out of a *Reader's Digest*. It is just about worn out from looking at it, but I think there are really good points in this. It states—

There have always been hard times. There have always been wars and troubles such as famine and disease. Some folks are born with money; some with none. In the end, it is up to the man what he becomes and none of these other things matter. It is character that counts.

Another one comes from George Washington Carver, which states—

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong, because some day you will have been all of these.

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I think that is very true. I am going to leave you with one last one. It is called *Good Example*, and I think we could all apply it—

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day,
I'd rather you would walk with me than merely tell me the way,
The eye is a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing but examples are always clear.
The best of all the teachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to put good into action is what everybody needs.

Thank you for inviting me along tonight. I have a deep love and commitment to and belief in the parliament of Queensland and in what it stands for as a democracy. As I said before, I do not believe the executive should be running the place. They can go to hell. They are not the parliament; they are just the government that comes down here and rubber stamps everything through. I wish you well in the future in your particular organisation. I hope that I have touched on a few things. I would be happy to answer any questions. I might put them on notice. Thank you.

Dr Reynolds: It is now open for anybody to ask questions or make any comments they want or if anybody said anything that you would like to take up and give your own interpretation on. I know both of our guests would be more than happy to answer questions. If you want a particular response from a particular person, just direct it to them, or if you want to leave it open so that they can both have a go, that is fine too.

Mr Pitt: I am not too sure of my facts, but I have been led to believe that in the United States Congress the type of business committee you talk about, Jim, operates. They decide how long legislation will be debated but then each side of the House is able to divide that time up according to need—in other words, if it is a five-hour debate someone can speak for four and a half hours if that is what the team wants them to do, and then they divide the other half an hour amongst themselves. Do you see a system like that operating here? Would it be successful?

Mr Fouras: I am not sure that I would recommend that. As I said before, I think 10 minutes is as much as you could put up with from anybody. I am not aware of that, but I do know that of course they have the filibuster over there where people have spoken for days. We do not have that in our system. We have a clock and when it says zero you say, 'Order! The honourable member's time has expired.' While I am on my feet, I wanted to share this with Neil. It did not happen in my time, but I did have this fantasy of one day getting up and walking out on the buggers if they were playing up too much. When I was at the House of Commons it was at the time when the poll tax had been brought on and there was just uproar. People were belting the chair or the table with their business sheets and it was just bedlam. People think that somehow or other we wild colonials can put on a show. Well, they put on a show and a half.

I went back around the corner to speak to the Speaker. I had a scotch with him, in fact. I said, 'That was bad.' He said, 'Oh, you should have been here a few months ago.' I said, 'What happened?' He said, 'It was dreadful.' I said, 'What did you do?' He said, 'I got up and said, "Honourable members, the House is in grave danger of being in grave disorder."' I said, 'What happened then?' He said, 'It got worse.' I said, 'What did you do?' He said, 'I got up and said, "Honourable members, the House is in grave disorder. The chair will resume at the ringing of the bells."' I said, 'What did you do then?' He said, 'I went and had a scotch,' and Neil had a cup of tea. I always had that fantasy. You did it. I was just gobsmacked. I did not know what was going on. I will always remember that. I was absolutely gobsmacked. But back to the issue, I am not sure. Neil, do you want to comment on that?

Mr Turner: No, not really. I would hate to think that from Hansard's point of view Len Stephan could speak for four and a half hours on a bill. I would just like to share one thing with you. During the one-hour notice of motion debate the opposition brought on whatever subject they liked. The Labor Party were in opposition at that time, naturally, when I was Speaker, and so they would bring on a motion for debate. It could be related to Aboriginals, it could be related to trade unions or it could be related to health. They have got a pretty good sort of working background and tentacles everywhere, so they would go out and get the rent-a-crowd that belonged to the teachers or the unions or the Aboriginals and fill the public gallery. Then they would start to put on a turn, clap and cheer and boo anyone that they did not like and clap the Labor speeches. I said, 'Order! Being in the public gallery isn't a right; it's a privilege. If you do not behave I will have you forcibly removed if necessary by the police and not allowed back. It's up to

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yourselves whether you want to hear the rest of the debate, so be quiet,' and they did. But that was not what I was going to tell you.

One night we got to the stage where the question 'that the House do now adjourn' was put. I was just about to say that and two young women handcuffed themselves onto the rail and threw a flag over the railing with 'Save the trees' or the sand dunes or the seals and the whales and the octopuses, or 'Kill the kids and have an abortion', or something like that. Anyhow, they threw it over the rail and I said, 'The parliament is now closed,' and just marched out and took the mace out. They were handcuffed with no key to the rail and we were having a fortnight off. Someone came to me and said, 'What are you going to do with them?' I said, 'Leave them there for the bloody fortnight. Give them a good drink of water so they'll learn not to do it again.' Anyhow, the police came and they wanted to know whether we wanted to lay charges. I said, 'No, they've been up there long enough.' They had been up there for about an hour, which is a long time in an empty chamber. They just got their timing wrong. So you do get some funny things that happen. Anyhow, that is just a thought. In terms of the other issue, no, we do not want Len Stephan talking for four and a half hours.

Participant: Or Tom Burns!

Mr Rozzoli: I want to comment on some of those things. When I was the Speaker I used to carry in my folder a little extract from a newspaper which recorded that in the Lok Sabha, the Indian parliament, a great riot had broken out which lasted for about five and a half hours. They had taken about 10 members of parliament off to hospital and wrecked half the furniture. But *Hansard* recorded—

12.15 p.m.—Business interrupted.

5.45 p.m.—Business resumed.

So there is a way of handling these things. I also have a couple of comments about order. I left the chair once in much the same circumstances that Neil referred to. It really is a very handy way sometimes of defusing an issue which is really getting out of hand. We have of course in New South Wales a legendary turbulent parliament known as the bearpit and it does get pretty stroppy there at times. So it is a very effective and a completely appropriate way in which the Speaker can conduct the affairs of the parliament.

The other thing is that we also have a stroppy public gallery. My technique used to be to cease the business of the parliament and just clear the gallery or ask the interrupting person in the gallery to remain silent. If they did not, I just absolutely cleared the gallery of the good guys as well as the bad guys. It was not long before the message got around that if you did that that was the outcome and the practice gradually disappeared. I think you have got to be very firm and stick to the rules if you want your parliament to be respected, and there really is no substitute for running it correctly.

I want to compliment Jim on his excellent run-down on the background of the Speakership. I think Neil mentioned the dignity of the parliament being very much in the hands of the Speaker. That is very much so and I think it is something we underrate in Australia to some extent. It is all the fault of the federal parliament, as most things are. They originally tried to set up a system based on the House of Commons where there was a bipartisan Speaker, but it only took about three months, I think, before that broke down and it has never got any better. I think it is a tragedy. So I am prepared to go on the record to say this, even if it is being recorded: I think the federal parliament does us a great disservice by not setting a better standard for their Speakers and not giving the Speaker the deference that is due to that office. Quite often in the debates just about every person who has been a leader of government as long as I have been observing it has been guilty of offence to the chair despite their protestations in opposition, and Jim is quite right—that is, that oppositions have these great ways of reforming the parliament. The challenge really is to do it in government.

When I came in as the Speaker I was given the brief to clean the place up. When I started to do it, the government got very stroppy. I actually threw out a government minister. That was the first time in 80 years that had happened. It hit the headlines and there was great to do about it, but after a while if people see you are fair, even though you are tough, it actually brings regard to the parliament. I think it is very important that that happens. I can only say to those members of parliament who are here that you will do much better in getting your message across

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in a parliament that is well conducted than you will in a House like we have at the moment in New South Wales, which is just absolute chaos where no-one really gets their message across. The only message you do get across is that the public hates us and we need to do a lot to restore our reputation by not being told what to do—not having codes of conduct and strict rules—but just simply realising that we are public representatives who should conduct ourselves with dignity, that we are role models to the community and that it is in our hands as to whether we allow our reputation to sink even lower or in fact raise it somewhat.

You are probably wondering why on earth I am saying these things, but perhaps I can introduce myself not so much as a member of parliament in New South Wales but as the President of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group. I have a real passion for the way in which parliaments are run and the process and the need to regain some of the dignity of parliament. I would like to compliment the chapter here for tonight and for raising what I think is a very important subject. Congratulations and it has been a pleasure to come up to join with you and listen to two wonderful speakers. Thank you.

Mr Turner: To the members of parliament here who might end up Speaker one day, I just thought I would give you a tip. Some people said to me, 'How do you control them when they're rowdy or unruly?' If I was near the Speaker's chair I said, 'I'll show you.' I would open up the drawer—Jim knows the drawer there—and, even though I have never even seen one in reality, I had a packet of Valium tablets. I said, 'If I know it's going to be rowdy that day, I go around just before the bells ring and drop a few tablets in all the water glasses around the room. If I don't get time to do that, I've got one of the attendants who does it for me. I just say, "Drop a few in," and after a few drinks of water they settle right down and they're happy and you don't have any more trouble.' That is not actually what happened.

When I was Speaker I was uniquely different to any other Speaker in the world I think, and that included Jim, because I took the front room, which was a beautiful room like this with high chandeliers. We had the Maltese cross on the floor and I had it embossed on the glass coffee table. It goes back to the knights of Malta and Queen Victoria and it is on our Queensland flag. I had a photo of the Queen, the Governor and a photo of the first Speaker ever above where I used to sit so that there was a photo of the first Speaker and the present Speaker. Delegations and ambassadors would visit that room. On one occasion I had the American ambassador visit. On the back of the door on the hat rack I had my whip, my little bull whip, my spurs and my cowboy hat and they would make comment about it. I would say, 'I've got the history of the parliament here, but I think you should have a bit of my history. I came from out west and I used to be a pretty wild bush man and I can crack the whip.' They would say, 'Can you?' It was only an outright crack. I never touched the chandeliers. It put security on guard a few times. Anyhow, it was most impressive.

It was the most photographed whip in the world. There would be a Japanese delegation and there would be 15 of them and they would line up the little fellows with me and then we would all hold the whip and smile. There was a Chinese delegation in there one day and I told the story. We talked trade and that sort of thing like Jim or any of us do, but it got around to the whip and I cracked it. They were most impressed. They took a lot of photos. I said to them, 'I can naturally cut a cigarette out of someone's mouth. Does anyone want to put a cigarette in their mouth?' No-one would ever volunteer. If I had the whip here, not one of you—not even Neil Laurie—would volunteer.

One little Chinese fellow said, 'Yes,' and he stuck the cigarette in his mouth and faced straight up to me. I thought, 'What do I take off? His left ear first or his right ear?' I had never done that front-on before. I said, 'Turn side on,' and I just flicked it. You do not crack it or you would hurt them. You only flick it out a bit. I flicked it out a bit and flicked the cigarette out of his mouth and they clapped and cheered and I thought, 'Neil, that is the silliest bloody thing you've ever done in your life. This could have been the end of Chinese-Australian relations. I'll never do that again.'

The American ambassador came in one day. She was a lovely woman by the name of Mrs Glenda Hawkins-Holmes. She had a couple of her staff with her and we talked about trade, American involvement in the Pacific war, the battle of the Coral Sea, sport and all that sort of thing. We got on to the whip thing. I recited my horse poem, which I will not repeat here because most members of parliament have heard it. It was a sad old horse poem which made her cry.

She got her hanky out and cried, and she said, 'You've made me cry.' I said, 'Well, I'd better make you laugh. I'll tell you the story of the bank manager who went out to Charleville in tough times and he wouldn't give anyone a loan. The bank had told him not to give any money out. An old fellow put in an application to develop his property and he kept knocking it back and he kept resubmitting the application. He kept knocking it back and this went on and on. The bank manager called him in and said, "You are one of the most persistent men I've ever seen. I'll give you the loan under one condition." The old fellow said, "What's that?" The bank manager said, "Well, I've only got one eye. I've got a glass eye but no-one out here knows which is the glass eye. If you can tell me which is the glass eye you've got the loan." The old fellow said, "It's your left eye." The bank manager said, "Good God! How did you pick it?" He said, "It had such a warm human look about it." She laughed.

I cracked the whip and told her the horse poem. I had to leave to go back into parliament and I said something about the embassy in Canberra. I said, 'I've never been there but I've driven past. It looks magnificent.' She said, 'Don't you ever come to Canberra without you coming down and having a cup of tea or a meal with us. You can meet my husband, but make sure you bring your whip down and show him how to crack the whip.' I thought, 'My God! What have I done?' I never did get around to going down, but I said, 'Look, I've made you laugh and I've made you cry and I've cracked the whip, so I'm going to kiss you goodbye.' I gave her a peck on the cheek and she seemed to like it. Did you do anything like that, Jim?

I had a son getting married in America and my wife's father was a baker in Germany when he was a young fellow and he made the wedding cakes for my two daughters and he wanted to make the one for my son, but we had to get it over there somehow. He was going to ice it when he got over there and he baked it in three pieces. We thought, 'What'll we do if they get Wally Lewis to tackle it when it gets out to the airport and smash it all to pieces?', so we carried it on the plane in three different pieces in boxes to get it over there. I thought, 'What's going to happen when we get it there and I've got to declare it? It's cake and they're going to say, "You can't bring it in" and some bloody porter at Los Angeles will be eating it.' I thought, 'What do I do?' So I rang her up—this whip woman—and she sent me a letter. When we got over there I declared this cake. They said, 'Well, let's have a look at this cake.' I said, 'What about you have a read of this letter.' They said, 'Oh my God! It's right. We'll carry the cake out to the car for you.' So it is marvellous what a letter can do for you. Anyway, they are just a few recollections.

Dr Reynolds: Thanks, Neil, and thanks for your recollections. Thank you also to Mr Rozzoli for coming. Are there any other questions?

Participant: This is addressed to either or both of our capitalist Speakers, and maybe Paul might like to give an overview as an articulate speaker who has never been a Speaker. A year or two ago I wrote down a comment by Professor John Cannon. He was the editor of the *Oxford Companion to British History*. He said that the Speaker has to reconcile the almost inarticulate assumptions of parliamentary government with the needs of a mass democracy. I am wondering if any or all of you would like to comment on that.

Mr Turner: The only comment I would make is that I would not refer—I do not know about Jim, but I do not think he would either—to any of us as 'capitalist Speakers'. I would prefer to think that I was a believer in free enterprise. In relation to the other part of your question, I think what you have to understand is that I did not come from an academic background. The worst time I had at school was the four years I put into grade 1. I took a shocking report card home to my father one time and he was frowning while he was looking at it. In the end I plucked up enough courage and said, 'What do you think of it, dad?' He said, 'There's one redeeming feature, son.' I said, 'What's that?' He said, 'With marks like this you haven't been cheating.' So he was proud of me. What you read out was just too much gobbledegook for me to answer actually, so I will leave it to Jim. Come on, Jim. You are the academic.

Mr Fouras: I am not sure that I agree with that. I do not think that the needs of parliament should be inarticulate. I think one of the problems we have as a society is that we do not do civics over here. When I became Speaker I set up an Education Office for the first time. Some videos were provided for people to see—both the primary and secondary levels—so that people could understand and be able to articulate what they expect from their parliaments. I think the two things should go hand in glove. There should not need to be any compromise between

those two concepts. I do not suggest that parliament's function should be difficult to articulate, so I do not agree with that statement.

Mr Rozzoli: I would like to add a comment to it. I think there is a constant challenge between the capacity of the powers of governance to successfully meet the needs of the community, but that is the dynamic which actually drives the process. You will never get such a perfect system that the needs of the community can manifest on the one side and then the processes of governance on the other side meets those demands completely. For whatever process you put up, whether you call it a parliament or whatever you call it, there will be that sort of cut and thrust between the demands of the community, which are often much greater than any government can possibly deliver, and the government that struggles to in fact introduce measures and policies against its philosophy which seem to try to meet the needs of the community. I think that most governments in the Westminster system try pretty conscientiously to meet that challenge. I think that that sort of comment, with all due respect, is very trite and unfair to both the community which is wanting to articulate its needs and the government which is trying to respond. We do not really go very far with smart alec comments. It is much more profound than you can reduce to such simple terms.

Dr Reynolds: I take a slightly different tack on that. I think that in Britain the parliamentary democracy is largely inarticulate because it is not written down; it has evolved. It is all based on conventions and conventions can change. The people who are in it and doing it understand the conventions; the people who are not in there and not doing it do not understand the conventions for the most part. So for the public it is largely inarticulate. The other thing about the mass democracy is that one has to remember that the party system arrived because of the mass democracy. When the franchise was limited to people—probably to men—and to practising members of the Church of England or to whatever the restrictions were in the 18th and 19th centuries, then you could have parliaments which were run by amateurs for amateurs. Parliaments did not do much in the 19th century. The parliaments here sat for maybe three weeks a year and all they did was development politics. They did not do much else. Not much else was expected of them until the arrival of the welfare state.

But prior to that with mass democracy coming the party system had to come to organise the options for the people. I know the two Independents here are not going to like this, but this is what we teach them at St Lucia. When that happened, of course, the parties put a gridlock on the parliament. So no longer did governments rise and fall on the fall of parliament. Government was in the party room, not on the floor of parliament. So those were the kinds of things that I think this guy is alluding to. That is a very bloody opaque way of doing it and I would give it a fail if it came out in an essay to me.

Participant: I want to comment as a practising teacher that we are very fortunate in that the school we are at does in fact teach civics. I would concur with Mr Fouras that the videos are really good, particularly the one about the dam issue. It is the one about building a dam which I have great fun with because my family has a property at Rathdowney and of course it is subtly disguised as another place and we are recognising all the locals in the background and the garage is still there and we still get petrol there. Also, the discovering democracy money that has been poured in by the federal government is out in all the schools. There is a lot of stuff, I think, especially through social science now. So I think some of us are really trying to teach the young adolescents that we have—because we are in the high school situation—about parliament. That is why we continue to come to these things. This is our in-service, so we go back better informed about parliament and so on. Thank you.

Mrs Liz Cunningham: I have to pick you up on your comment, I am sorry. The party system I think in a lot of ways has ensnared parliament and the democracy of parliament simply because communities are no longer represented by their member; they are represented when it suits the party and the member is ensnared again by the party's requirements. That is not what I was going to say initially until your comment.

Participant (inaudible).

Mrs Liz Cunningham: Yes, and I do not think I would have changed my mind. Jim commented on the business committee. My concern with that—it is probably more of a comment than a question—is that my experience is that major parties find it very difficult to cope with new structures—that is, the number of Independents in the parliament and new emerging minor

parties such as One Nation and the new minor party of the Liberal Party. I believe that that business committee would in great measure—

Participant (inaudible).

Mrs Liz Cunningham: Well, they are a minor party because there are only three of them. That business committee would, I am sure, look after the interests of the major parties but would in no way try to identify and accommodate the needs of the Independents or the minor parties in representing their communities' concerns.

I wanted to commend both Jim and Neil. I have not had the privilege of being in the parliament when Jim was the Speaker but for six months I have seen him operate as Deputy Speaker and endeavour to be impartial and objective and commend him for that. I think tonight we have heard why Neil managed a very difficult parliament as well as he did, and that was often with his sense of humour. But parliament remains the place where the democracy of this state is best practised. We have a responsibility to do it with dignity and with respect. We also have a responsibility to do it in such a way that our students, when they come and look over the gallery, respect as adults the decision makers whom they are viewing on the floor—in many instances they do not—if we as decision makers expect them to respect the laws that we create, and in many instances that is an anomaly. I wanted also to thank you for the opportunity tonight to listen to two very accomplished Speakers. It has been most entertaining and educational. Congratulations.

Mr Laurie: I want to make a comment in relation to the business committee and how it operates in Victoria. As I understand it, what you are saying about the interests of Independents not being taken into account may be the case. I cannot comment on that. The main function of the business committee is that they will decide something and they will come in and basically tell the parliament on the first morning what is going to be the program of business for the week—that is, there will be seven bills passed this week and consideration on this bill has to be done by 5 o'clock on Tuesday, consideration on this bill has to be done by 1 o'clock on Wednesday and consideration of this bill has to be done by this time on Thursday. I do not know what deliberations go on and things of that nature, but I suppose Tuesday morning everybody has a fairly good idea as to what business is going through and the latest period as to when it is going to get through.

Dr Reynolds: That is some technical information which I do not think many of us had access to.

Participant: This question is directed to any of the three Speakers. I return to the issue of the British Westminster system as opposed to the Australian Westminster system. Under their system over there the Speaker resigns from his party during his term as Speaker. Can any of you see any value in that being adopted in Australia? One of you mentioned that that needs to be done first at the federal level. If we wait until it is done at a federal level, should we perhaps start at the state level and then put the pressure on the federal level to follow suit?

Mr Turner: Thank you for the question. I think the UK system is a good system. It works well there, but the numbers are vastly different to what they are here and you very rarely have a hung parliament, if you like. Where the Speaker resigns from the party and does not ever belong to that party again or go to party meetings and is truly independent is a good system, but I do not see it being implemented here. I think the party political system is too much opposed to it happening. I know that I am diverting back a little bit to Liz, but I have had a number of people talk to me about Independents. With due respect, I know that a lot of Independents have done a lot of good work, and, Liz, I include you in that. I think you have been a fantastic member and Independent.

I have said hypothetically to people who espoused the theory that every member of parliament should be an Independent, 'Do you really think that would work, because when you came down to parliament after a while there would be a group on the Darling Downs and somewhere around the Warwick area get together, sit down at a table and say, "We'll get together. Call us a party or call us a bloc or call us what you like—a group, a clique—and we'll vote in the parliament to get our roads all fixed up." Then there'll be a mob of us up the north coast and we'll say, "If we get together and join with them, we'll get our roads and that done." So it gravitates through to becoming parties, cliques, groups and getting away from the

Independents. That is how I think it must have evolved, if you like, and it would evolve that way if you went right back to Independents at the present moment.

When people say, 'You're in a party and you brought something in,' I often say, 'What you've got to understand is that if you're in a political party, whether it's Jim Fouras or Neil Turner or whoever it might be, and something comes up for debate, it's not unlike being a member of the local parents and citizens community at Maleny. They're debating at a committee meeting one night on how to raise funds for the school. Paul wants to have a flower show and I want a rodeo and we talk and debate and people argue about it. In the end, to resolve the issue they have a vote on it in the P&C, and Paul wins the day. They're going to have a flower show.' I just ask everyone in this room: what sort of a member of the P&C who has kids at the Maleny school do you think I am if I spit the dummy and say, 'I'm going home. If we can't have a rodeo I'm not selling bloody flowers?' No, I will say, 'Righto. What corner do you want me to sell the stupid things on? I'll help.'

That is how your political party makes decisions. It still works as a democracy. You vote for it. You have your say and I have my say. I have had my say on lots of things. Gun laws was one of the stupidest things we ever did. It was going to reduce gun related crime and in five years it has gone up 75 per cent, much like taking the cane away from the teachers. It was enforcing violence on young children so we had to take it away from them. One would naturally assume that there has been a corresponding reduction in the levels of violence but, no, it has gone through the ceiling. I could go on about a lot of other issues like that. We have our vote in the party room. Whether it is in the Labor Party, the Nationals or the Liberals, if you do not win the day you do not spit the dummy and not vote for it. You are part of the political system. That is the way it functions. I think in the main it functions fairly well.

My observation is that most members of parliament from any political party who come to this parliament are motivated by good intentions to do the best that they can for the people in their electorates or their party. We all do it differently. I do not agree with everything that is done by other parties and they surely would not want to agree with everything we have done. That would be stupid. Anyhow, thanks for our comments before. I think the other members can answer in relation to the English system. I think it would have been wonderful if they had brought it in when I was still there and kept me on as Speaker.

Mr Rozzoli: I might throw in just a slightly controversial view. I am a very firm believer in independent Speakers. I have written papers on this and have devised a system whereby you could do it in Australia. You could not follow the English model, because we just do not have the disciplines and the traditions and the conventions that govern the English model. But there is a way that you could do it, and I believe that it would greatly enhance the quality of parliaments. In my system I actually put a time limit on the period that a person could serve as Speaker. Neil suggested, perhaps facetiously, that you could almost stay there forever. That would not apply, because in England the Speaker voluntarily stands down after about eight or nine or so years.

When I was the Speaker I was one of the most fiercely independent Speakers that I think they have ever seen. I never attended party meetings. I completely divorced myself from party politics other than within my own electorate, because I had to go back and fight an election at election time. But apart from that I completely divorced myself from anything to do with politics in parliament. I served for four years in a minority government situation where we did not know from one day to the next what the vote was going to be and it was terribly important that the parliament ran well and that I had the trust of the opposition that I would in fact run the parliament properly.

So that level of independence that I voluntarily asserted, because I thought it was the right thing to do, was very useful later on because they believed me when I said that I was no party to any of the tactics being used by the government and nor was I a party to the tactics used by the opposition, yet both came to me for procedural advice on what they should do. I would say, 'I don't care what you do as long as you do it within the rules and this is the rule that you have to abide by there.' I really think that, if governments could take their courage in both hands and admit that there is value in having an independent Speaker, you could do it. What I would do would be to make sure that in addition to the Speaker there was an uneven number of members on the floor.

Role of the Speaker

What we have in New South Wales is that we have 93 or 99 or 109 or whatever it has been. That means that, if you have a government that has one more member than an even number, you take the Speaker out when the Speaker has to vote on everything to support the government. I had my own rules to govern where the Speaker used his casting vote, but if you had the system that I suggest should be brought in, which would leave an uneven number of members in the House, if you had the situation where there was just government and opposition, one side or the other would have a majority vote on the floor of the House and the only time the Speaker would then use the casting vote would be if, say, a government member was away or the vote failed to reach a decision. Then you could really implement the true casting vote situation with regard to a chairman—that is, you vote with the status quo because the government would always have the opportunity to reintroduce that question to the House when it had got the numbers again.

Once I gave my casting vote with the opposition, because I always said that if it was not a matter of government but a matter of private members' business I would always vote for the status quo. I did it once and cast my vote in favour of the opposition on a procedural motion and they were so amazed and stunned and bewildered as to what happened that when it came to the substantive vote they failed to call a division which they would have won. They came to me afterwards and said, 'What actually happened?', because it was just so rare. I think if we could get back to that we would in fact raise the quality of parliament considerably.

Mr Fouras: Actually, I think under our system—away from the House of Commons—the Speaker should have a deliberate vote and not a casting vote and if the votes are tied then the issue is lost. I think one of the things that would do is remove the opportunity for people in very tight situations in parliament to sort of buy somebody by putting them in the chair so that they would take a vote out of the equation. That is the first thing. Secondly, if we could get the culture of the world to do it—I agree with Kevin—I think that we ought to have independent Speakers. We do have a secret ballot for Speakers. It is the only ballot that you have which is secret which indicates, of course, the whole idea of the members having a say. I know on many occasions from my readings that the choice of the executive in British parliaments is always run over if there is some concept there that that is what the executive wants, because the members are just so determined to have an independent Speaker and to make sure that that person is truly independent.

Yes, I would support it. I think that you have to have a very big cultural change and then you would choose somebody who was quite happy not to want to go back to the hurly-burly of politics. If Kevin's idea was right that it was for a predetermined period of time, then that person would have no agenda that anybody could ever question. I do think that in the parliament, particularly in tight situations, there is this expectation from the government of the day that the person is their Speaker and when the crunch comes that they must jump as they are told. I think there is no doubt at all about that, and I think it would be good for the parliament—absolutely.

Dr Reynolds: I just want to make a comment about that, too. The Speaker is a very ambivalent position as far as political ambition is concerned. There have been occasions in the Queensland parliament and in the federal parliament where a member has been elected and has deliberately set his sights on being the Speaker. I know of several instances in political history of that, but it is rare. I was phoned on the day of 3 September 1989 by a very angry new member for Ashgrove who said to me, 'The bastards have offered me the Speakership. Why don't I get a ministry?' I said to him, 'Because you were out for three years and you've lost continuity.' He said, 'Never mind,' and Jim, in his furious Greek style, bent my ear.

Mr Fouras (inaudible).

Dr Reynolds: You were. And do you remember what I said to you? I said, 'If you become Speaker and reform the parliament, you'll get a chapter. They'll get footnotes,' and it is true. He did reform the parliament and was sneered at by the Premier of the day for doing so. I remember Goss saying in a public forum which I think we sponsored, 'Oh, yes, and the member for Ashgrove, he'll always tell you what a great reforming Speaker he was.' I thought, 'Yes, Jim did it.' But let that be the case. Neil has interestingly enough said too that he did not expect to be Speaker when the coalition returned under those circumstances after the Mundingburra by-election.

Role of the Speaker

So there have been people who have the ambition to be Speaker but not many. The reason is that in our small parliaments, unless you are completely hopeless and you are also a member of a major party or coalition of parties, you have almost the expectation of being a minister provided you keep your seat, you keep your nose clean with your party and you are either a good hardworking backbencher or you are a head kicker—and all parties have them but they do not have any more of them than they need—then you can have a reasonable expectation. Since 75 per cent of seats in the English parliament are safe seats, all you have to do is be there and be competent and not fall over in the member's bar once too often. So the Speakership becomes a sort of a prize. Jim thought it was a consolation prize, but it was not. In fact, I cannot understand why more politicians do not want to be Speaker. You have got all the privileges of a minister without a line department to trip you up and put time bombs in your way all the time.

Participant (inaudible).

Dr Reynolds: Yes, you have got to control the Clerk, but the Clerk is only one. So I think—

Participant (inaudible).

Dr Reynolds: Yes, it would be a real doddle. If I was a member of parliament I would want to be the Speaker. You get that lovely flat down there. Everybody around this place thinks you are God and treats you as though you are God. I do not think there can be a better job in politics myself.

Mr Fouras (inaudible).

Dr Reynolds: And you did not see the position as going anywhere, Jim. That is a point, because it had not in previous governments. I am going to ask John if he would move the vote of thanks. Before I do, I just want to remind you that it is customary after our meetings to all gather in the Belle Vue Room, the old Strangers Bar, and there will be a cash bar, some light refreshments and tea and coffee. You are more than welcome once we have finished here just to move across the walkway above the Speakers Green to the Belle Vue Room. Andrew is going to organise the catering for us. So that is great. Without further ado, John.

Participant: Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure I can speak on your behalf and thank our honourable speakers—no pun intended—and our guest Kevin. It has been a most illuminating evening. I am sure we all enjoyed it immensely. Would you join me in a round of applause for our invited guests.