

# I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Five MPs first elected to federal parliament in 1993 talk about their experiences in the House of Representatives, and agree experience does count.

*Story: Peter Cotton*

**H**arry Quick concedes that, like most politicians, he has a healthy ego. Luckily, he also has a large coterie of constituents ready to deflate him should his ego get overblown.

"Just about every male that comes into my office asks the receptionist 'Is the bastard in?'," says Mr Quick, Member for Franklin (Tas). "That always brings me back to reality.

"They say it in a loving way, and they know that if they need \$20

for petrol, or a boot load of wood, or if they need help sorting out their kid who's taking drugs, me or my staff will do what's required to make their life a bit easier."

Harry Quick is one of the 14 remaining members of the 'Class of '93', a group of 27 politicians who first won a seat and entered the House of Representatives at the election held on 13 March 1993.

The 'Class of '93' will lose another member at the next election, as Harry Quick, who'll be 65 in June, is retiring at the end of this term. "I figure that

after five terms you become institutionalised," he says. "Anyway, there's more to life than being stuck in Canberra for 20 or 25 years. I could be there till they cart me out, but I want someone else to have the opportunity, and I want to do other things."

Mr Quick says he's achieved more than he ever dreamt was possible in his 13 years as a parliamentarian. "I can proudly look back on my work in committees," he says. "We produced some excellent reports and recommendations which have

Left to right: Lindsay Tanner, Bob Katter, Harry Quick, Christopher Pyne and Judi Moylan. Photos: AUSPIC Continued page 42 ►



influenced government initiatives, especially in the House Committee on Family and Human Services. That committee, and its predecessors, inquired into homelessness and substance abuse, and into the management and treatment of breast cancer.”

After the next election, Mr Quick will travel to China to teach English for a year. He'll then decide what next to do with his life. He has some advice for the remaining members of the 'Class of '93': "I think they should seriously have a look at whether they're there because there's nothing else for them," he says, "or whether they're there to achieve something that they haven't even thought of yet."

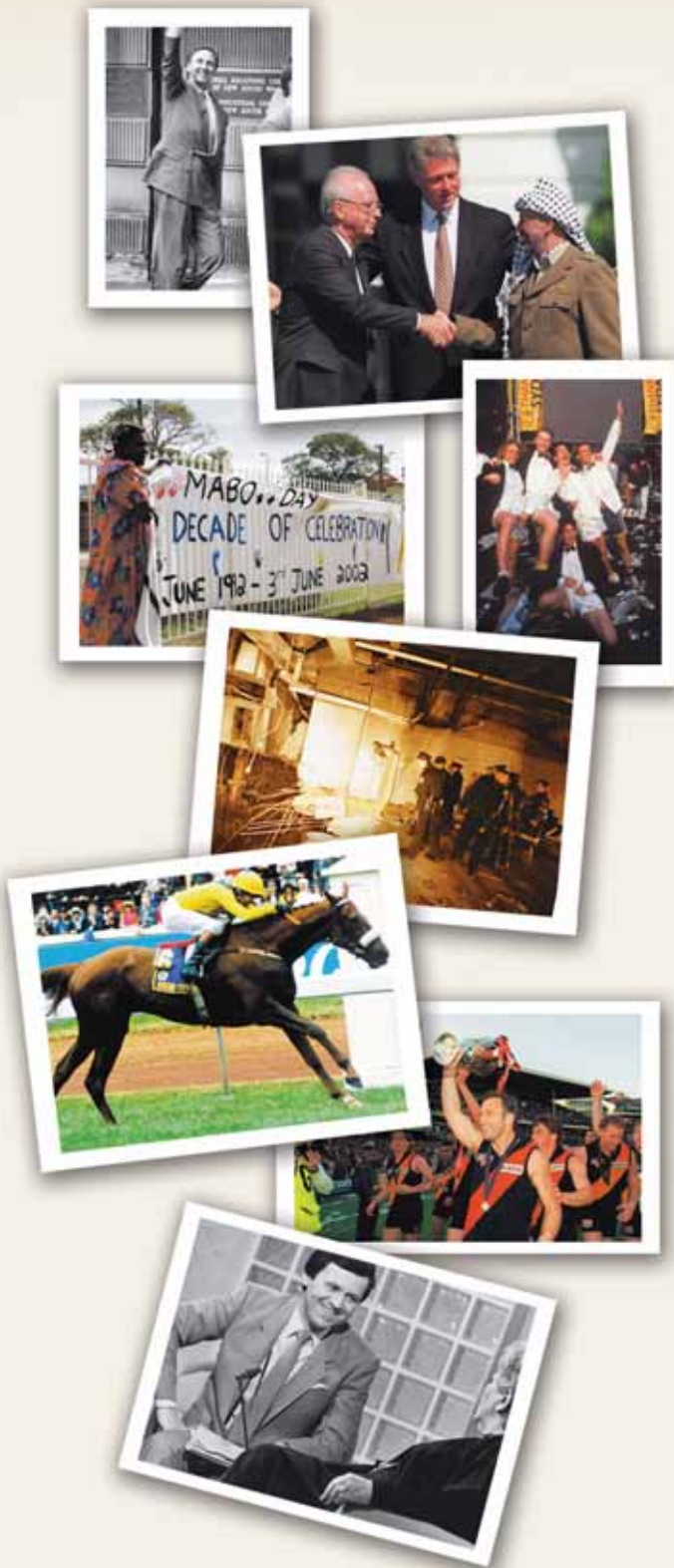
The youngest member of the 'Class of '93', the Member for Sturt (SA), Christopher Pyne, is still only 38. He says the political passions he brought into parliament are the same ones that drive him today. "I have a passion for making sure that everything we do in government gives those with the least in the community the greatest opportunities," says Mr Pyne.

Like all members, before he can re-contest his seat at the next election, Mr Pyne must once again win Liberal Party pre-selection. He says members looking to secure their hold on a seat generally adopt one of two approaches: "They either encourage branch membership and the young people in their branches, give them opportunities and get them involved," he says. "The downside of that is that they might try and knock you off at pre-selection.

"The other approach is to discourage your young and enthusiastic party members, find ways to exclude them, and only keep the people you know involved. That approach flattens out the party membership in your electorate and some members choose to go that way.

"My attitude has always been to build my membership up, so while party membership across all electorates has dropped dramatically since I was first elected, membership in my electorate is higher than when I was first elected, and the members are supportive and encouraging and there's no sense that they want to have me removed."

Given his youth when he entered the House, is there anything Mr Pyne



### Snapshot of 1993

*In 1993, when 27 new MPs were elected to the House of Representatives: (from the top) 1. The Keating government was returned at the March federal election; 2. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed a peace agreement watched by US President Bill Clinton; 3. The Native Title Act was introduced following the 1992 High Court decision in the Mabo case; 4. Sydney won the right to host the 2000 Olympic Games; 5. The World Trade Centre in New York was bombed; 6. Vintage Crop won the Melbourne Cup; 7. Essendon beat Carlton in the AFL Grand Final; and 8. Ray Martin left the Middyay Show. Photos: AAP and Newspix*

would have done differently if he knew back then what he knows now? “Yes,” he says. “What I’ve learnt after 13 years in politics is to be happy with the job you have at the moment, rather than pining for another job.

“If I’d learnt that when I was 25, rather than when I was 37, I probably would have had an easier road to hoe. Ambition is a good thing, but you don’t want it to be your only guide.

“When I got into parliament so early, I should have recognised that it was very young and I should have been less ambitious. Now that I’m in my late thirties, I realise that opportunities often present themselves to people when they’re not seeking them, as opposed to when they are seeking them.

“If people had said to me back in 1993, you can take your foot off the accelerator, you don’t have to push so hard, that would have been good advice.”

Mr Pyne says being in public life is all he ever wanted to do, and after 13 years in the House it’s still all he wants to do. “I enjoy every moment of it, even when it’s disappointing,” he says. “It’s an exhilarating job, and as long as I keep winning my seat, I expect to stay in politics for a long time.”

One member of the ‘Class of ’93’ who might wish their political future was so assured is the Member for Pearce (WA), Judi Moylan.

Ms Moylan, together with the Member for Kooyong (Vic), Petro Georgiou, the Member for Cook (NSW), Bruce Baird and the Member for McMillan (Vic), Russell Broadbent, last year successfully pressured the government to change its stance on the detention of children and their parents who had entered Australia without a permit and were applying for refugee status.

Ms Moylan says while the public response to her speaking out on children in detention was overwhelmingly positive, she concedes it might affect her chances of again being pre-selected to contest Pearce.

“There are people with deeply entrenched views who didn’t like the stance I took,” she says, “but it was something I’d thought deeply about, it was very important, and it went beyond what my future might be. It

was one of those times in life when you have to stand up and be counted.”

Judi Moylan nominates her time as Minister for Family Services (11.3.96 to 9.10.97) and Minister for the Status of Women (9.10.97 to 21.10.98) as highpoints in her life, even though they were also very difficult times. “As a minister, I introduced changes that revolutionised the aged care sector and resulted in more modern facilities for people needing high level care,” she says.

Since leaving the ministry, Ms Moylan has taken an active interest in China and has led several delegations to that country. She’s also been the Chair of the Public Works Committee since 1998.

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Ms Moylan says at the time she was elected to the House, she had no political experience and so made lots of political mistakes. “I didn’t understand as fully as I might the politics played by various interest groups,” she says. “They played very hard ball on aged care and child care, particularly when it looked like some of them might lose revenue as a result of the changes I proposed as minister. There was a very personal campaign against me, but I don’t have any regrets. I try and learn from my mistakes, but essentially I just move on.”

“I was not a really political person when I entered parliament,” she says, “and I still don’t talk in political speak, and I think that’s valued in the electorate. I believe there’s a place for everyone in our parliament—a place for people with lots of experience in politics, and a place for people like me who had none.”

Ask the Member for Melbourne (Vic) Lindsay Tanner whether five terms is enough time for a person to occupy a seat in the House and he bats the question away, saying you can’t generalise about such things. A lot depends on the individual, he says, and what’s going on at the time. “My predecessor, Gerry Hand, was fortunate to have his entire 10 years

in the House in government,” says Mr Tanner, “and six of his 10 years were spent as a minister.”

Needless to say, having spent 10 of his 13 years in the House on the opposition benches, Mr Tanner is more than keen to be a minister in a federal Labor government after the next election.

“We all want to end up in the most important and influential positions that we can manage,” he says. “Performance and circumstances govern how far any individual goes and much of the circumstance that affects us is beyond our control. All you can focus on is doing the best that you can in the position that you occupy.”

Regardless of future outcomes, Mr Tanner describes being a member of the House of Representatives as an extraordinary privilege. “Politics is one of those vocations that some of us have in our genes,” he says. “There’s only about 1,000 Australians who have been members of the House in its 105 year history, so for me, as a person who has been active in politics since I was a teenager, this is amazing, and even though I’ve spent all these years in opposition, it’s the best thing on offer.”

Lindsay Tanner disagrees with the proposition that oppositions have no impact on policy formation, and he rejects the thought that opposition members just make up the numbers. “That’s wrong,” he says. “Oppositions can have a substantial effect on political outcomes because governments take note of opposition positions on issues and those positions do influence what governments do.

“[When formulating policy], a government considers whether it is going to be hit by a full-on opposition assault on its position, or whether the opposition will acquiesce. It’s a factor governments take into account when considering which way to go.

“An opposition can also have a substantial impact on public debate and opinion formation on issues. It’s just nowhere near as immediate or powerful as being in government.”

As for mistakes during his 13 years in the House, Lindsay Tanner concedes he’s made a few. “I can look back on particular performances that would have been better had I had the

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level of experience that I've now got, but that's life," he says. "It's like asking why a footballer who's only played 10 games didn't play like a footballer who's played 200 games. The answer is that they'd only played 10 games.

"I have no regrets. You learn in this job every day and hopefully you improve. Politics is infinitely contestable. There is no absolute right and no absolute wrong. There are only contested perceptions and the ultimate judgment on your performance comes from the electorate. I always look forward and I'll conduct any inquiry into my past performance in my retirement."

During his time in the House, Lindsay Tanner has written two substantial books, *Open Australia* and

*Crowded Lives*, both of which examine the major issues confronting Australia.

He says the most important ingredient for an individual entering parliament is to have a passion to achieve a better society. "I strongly believe in the value of learning as a good thing in its own right, and in fostering a culture of learning to enable all Australians to become better off economically and better as people."

Another member of the 'Class of '93' who exhibits great passion on issues is the Member for Kennedy (Qld), Bob Katter.

In fact Mr Katter says he feels more passionate now about the things that affect his constituents than he did when he first entered the House 13 years ago. "I can see things more clearly now," he says. "In the past there were great things done by governments which helped build our nation's industries. Now I'm seeing those great things undone."

When elected to the House in 1993, Mr Katter was a member of

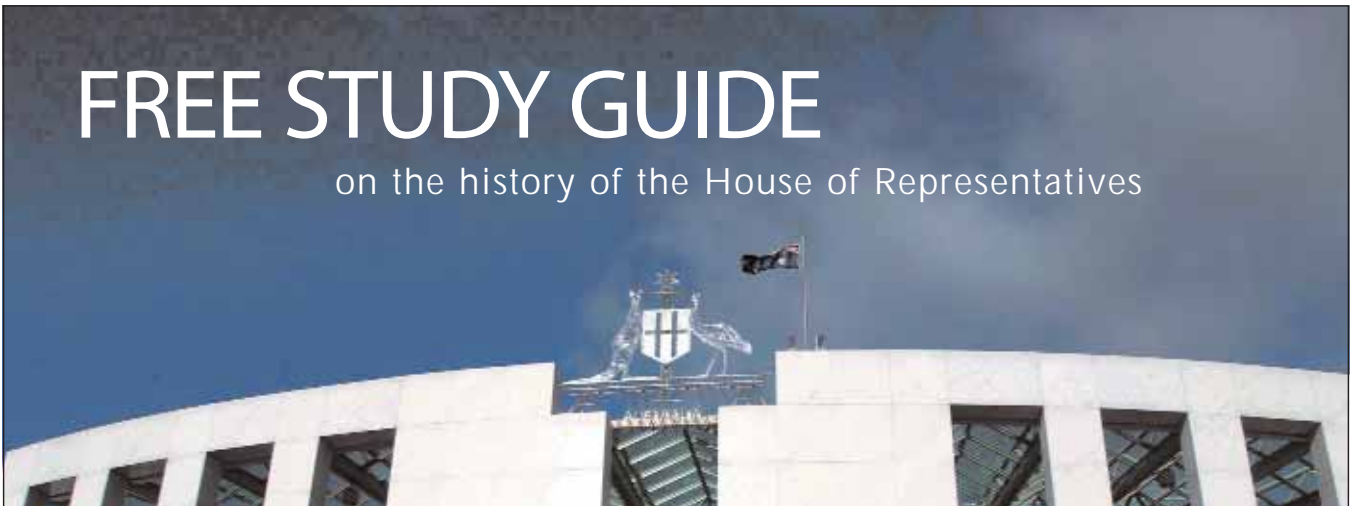
the National Party. He broke from the Nationals six years ago and now sits on the cross benches as an independent. He wears the tag 'maverick' with some pride and is a fierce advocate for his electorate, especially its primary producers.

Asked if he shouldn't make way for new blood after five terms in the House, Mr Katter responds: "I don't see it that way. I would have liked to retire after my 20 years in the state [Queensland] House," he says, "but I've still got to be here. I'm out there to kill them. Kill the policies that are killing my country. And I'm most certainly out there to take out anyone I can who is continuing with those policies."

Mr Katter says his greatest achievement as a member of the House was helping secure three assistance packages for the sugar industry, amounting to half a billion dollars over the past decade, which he says enabled more than 92 per cent of the industry to survive. ■

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