



DEPARTMENT of the
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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ALUMNI Newsletter



Clerk's Message

Dear Alumni

As I write to you, we are heading into Budget week. The House has had a typically busy start to the year in terms of the chambers, with 'debate management motions' extending some nights for debate on legislation, and committees being productive in terms of submissions, hearings, and reports. Added to this, February was bookended by the Speaker presiding over addresses from the floor, with the President and senators attending to hear first from Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Marape and then from Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

In the first four weeks also, the Speaker announced he had issued writs for two by-elections. The first was due to the death of Ms Peta Murphy in December, and the by-election was held on 2 March, with the new Member for Dunkley, Ms Jodie Belyea, taking her place after making an affirmation on 18 March. The second by-election, in the Cook electorate, follows the resignation on 29 February of former Prime Minister Scott Morrison,

and is set down for 13 April. The House should be fully formed once more in time for the Budget, with the new Member for Cook taking the tally of new members for the 47th Parliament to 39.

Two colleagues who won't be back for Budget week are James Catchpole who is retiring after 33 years with the department, and AUSPIC's David Foote who is retiring after 32 years as a photographer of all things parliamentary, including us. I will miss them both, they have been wonderful parliamentary colleagues.

I'm pleased to say we have just finished hosting the first Inter-Parliamentary Study Program for staff since the COVID-19 pandemic. I am grateful to colleagues across the Parliamentary Service for refreshing their presentations and welcoming colleagues from parliaments near and far—House of Commons, Canada; European Parliament; Bundestag, Germany; House of Councillors, Japan Diet; Senate, Palau; House of Representatives, Philippines; Singapore; Riksdag, Sweden; House of Commons, United Kingdom; and



Vanuatu. To round out the group this time, we included two newer senior staff of our own, one from each of the House of Representatives and Senate departments.

On another happy note, for the first time since 2017, due to the pandemic, the department has been negotiating a new Enterprise Agreement. Voting concluded on 13 March and the department had great results of 93.1% participation in the ballot and 99.38% voting 'yes' to approve the agreement. We expect the agreement to be approved shortly and for it to come into effect after that.

Finally, it is in the early days of planning, but late breaking news is that Ms Nikki Savva is expected to deliver the fourth Speaker's Lecture in September with details to be confirmed. You are most welcome to attend, and I have asked that the Alumni receive confirmation and any details when they are available.

With best wishes until next time. 🌿

Claressa Surtees
Clerk of the House



▲ Autumn blooms in the House of Representatives Garden

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The 2023 Annual General Meeting and Alumni Reception

On the evening of Thursday, 23 November 2023, Department of the House of Representatives alumni and current staff came together for the 2023 AGM and Alumni reception. Attendees were warmly welcomed to the gathering by the Clerk, Claessa Surtees. Co-Chair Joanne Towner delivered the 2023 Co-Chair's Report and thanked Julia Agostino for her services to the Alumni. Election of 2024 office bearers was undertaken with Joanne Towner (see *Issue 18*, July 2017) and Colin Christian being elected co-chairs; Kate Leonard (see *Issue 27*, April 2023) re-elected secretary and Jim Pender continuing as the editor of the Alumni newsletter.

With the formalities completed attendees were able to spend a pleasant evening reconnecting with past colleagues and alumni. Sincere thanks go to the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Tracy Weston and staff from the Clerk's Office for their continued support of the alumni and their coordination and support of the AGM and reception.

MEET YOUR NEW CO-CHAIR, COLIN CHRISTIAN

I have been in the hospitality industry since leaving school. I did an apprenticeship in cooking at the Hooker Canberra Rex which, at the time, was the number one hotel in Canberra (there was no Lakeside, Hyatt or other first-class hotel in Canberra). I then moved on to work at the new Lakeside Hotel and was involved from its opening as a trainer manager working in a variety of areas. Then it was back to the Canberra Rex until I joined the Joint House Department's hospitality section in Old Parliament House (OPH). 43 years on from catering manager in OPH to functions manager in the Department of the House of Representatives (DHR) International and Parliamentary Relations Office (IPRO) I decided to retire. During this time I acted as chef in OPH and then when moving to the new Parliament House I had to miss out on the opening day celebrations as the guests, too many to attend dinner in the new parliament building, were catered for with a black tie dinner in OPH.

I was literally thrown into the job as chef as the chef in OPH decided to resign seven months before the opening of the new Parliament House. There already had been a chef appointed for the new house so I was it for OPH.

Once I moved to the new Parliament House, I took charge of the function area and was responsible for many VIP functions. Everyone wanted to come to the new Parliament House in the early days. Hiring out the Great Hall for functions when Parliament was not sitting meant a lot more work for my area. Members and Senators would also book other private dining areas where they could host their constituents and lobby groups and such like.

A decision was made by the Presiding Officers to privatise the catering in the building and I luckily was taken on by the new catering company.

Eventually I moved to IPRO organising functions for the Parliamentary



Departments and the Presiding Officers and liaising with the private caterers to ensure everything went smoothly.

I am still making my way in retirement.



VALE – Paul Thomas

News of Paul's sudden death on 6 February came as a tremendous shock to his many friends in the Department of the House of Representatives Alumni. Although Paul had retired from the department in December 2009, very few members of the Alumni would not have been aware of his distinguished contribution to the work of the Parliament.

Paul's career in the Department commenced on 26 February 1985 when he was appointed to a position in the

Table Office. Always a keen observer and a careful listener, and blessed with a most agreeable nature, Paul immediately won the respect of all his colleagues - they realised very quickly that with him it was a case of the right person arriving at the right time.

In those days the work of the House was supported by a cluster of well developed and reliable systems - they were tried and true, but they were also very labour-intensive. With his fresh

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eyes and deep understanding of the potential of information technology Paul was soon leading his colleagues in harnessing its potential to improve efficiency and remove much of the drudgery. The improvements that followed were introduced so smoothly and so incrementally that it is only with the benefit of hindsight that we can appreciate their full extent. The common element in them all was Paul – cheerful, patient, calm and respectful, and so clever and creative – his was a winning combination of high-level talent and a low-key style. Paul gave us all the very best help he could – an inquiry from the most junior colleague was given as much care as one from the Clerk. His great sense of humour was another of his strengths.

After 15 years in the Table Office, it was no surprise that Paul's talents saw him moved to the Information Systems and Publishing team with its department-wide responsibilities. There was of course no doubt that, as well as other areas of the House, Members and staff in other parts of the Parliament would soon join the list of beneficiaries of Paul's great skills.

Paul played an important role in broadening the understanding of House proceedings. His Votes Officers Minutes allowed colleagues to follow the business of the House as a sitting day

unfolded. This system was very useful to us all, but it was particularly helpful to colleagues who were interested in, but not confident about, procedural work.

House staff are motivated by the knowledge that their work in supporting the Parliament benefits the wider community. One of Paul's projects delivered a particularly direct public benefit: interested people had long found it difficult and often frustrating to obtain quick and accurate details of progress on the daily business of the House. The Live Minutes system, which evolved from the Votes Officers Minutes, solved this problem – it delivered reliable information, updated every five minutes, during a sitting day. Live Minutes became widely used and was appreciated and acknowledged internationally as a practical and helpful solution to a very common problem. It was only one of Paul's legacies, but not an unimportant one.


Paul must have been proud of his many achievements, but he tried very hard not to show it! With him it was a classic case of deep learning carried lightly, help and encouragement given instinctively and generously and advice given respectfully.

It seems fitting that Paul's carefully chosen second career was in the building industry because his first career colleagues could see that he was in fact a gifted builder – a builder of

systems, but also a builder of teams, building the skills, and also building the confidence, of his workmates.

His colleagues were delighted to see Paul's great happiness in his family life. He and Branka cherished four fine children: Chris, Michael, Katherine and Samantha. He balanced work and family responsibilities deftly – colleagues recall one occasion when he shot home between shifts to tile a patio. His second career as a self employed Building Certifier should at least have made such juggling a little easier!

We can barely imagine the depth of Branka, Chris, Michael, Katherine and Samantha's sorrow at this time, but we can hope that they will take some comfort in the certain knowledge that Paul drew the greatest joy from their love and support. Members of the Alumni extend their deepest sympathy to them.

We record our admiration for Paul's sustained and distinguished contribution to Parliament. We give thanks for his warm friendship and for the fine example he set – he combined so many of the qualities a modern Parliamentary Officer might hope to possess. Paul was respected and liked by everybody who had the privilege of working with him and will continue to be remembered with great fondness. 


VALE – Samantha Mannette

Sam passed away peacefully in hospital in the evening of Friday, 12 January 2024, after falling unwell earlier that day.

Many of you will know Sam and will have worked with her during her career. Sam joined the Department in January 2005, having previously worked for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. Sam went on to provide high-quality support

to many committees, most recently as Inquiry Secretary to the House Standing Committee on Economics, as well as past service in the Chamber Research Office, the Table Office and as Director Committee Support. Sam had also served as a Deputy Clerk in the Federation Chamber since 2017.

All of us who had the pleasure of working with Sam will remember her as a kind and thoughtful colleague.

Sam was concerned with the welfare of the wider Department and was always ready to assist in a range of capacities, including her significant contribution to the work of the Social Club over many years. Sam received an Australia Day medallion in 2015 in recognition of her outstanding support for the work of the House and the Department, and last year was selected for our inaugural EB1 Emerging Leaders' program. 

FOR THE DIARY

For the last few years, Covid permitting, the Alumni has had one function each year, combining both the AGM and a reception hosted by the Department of the House of Representatives.

A number of members have indicated they would like to meet more frequently in a social setting. We would like to see how much interest there is more generally in such an event. To this end we are proposing to schedule one lunch initially, and perhaps moving to two in future years. The proposed date is:

► **Friday 17 May 2024, at 12.15pm at the Southern Cross Yacht Club.**

This is not a hosted event (i.e. attendees will be responsible for their own food and drink). We have tried to avoid school holidays and the colder winter months, as a number of you may have babysitting duties or travel plans. To assist with letting the venue know numbers, please let the Secretary know by Friday 10 May. If you are driving to the venue, please check the Club's website for parking arrangements (www.csccl.com.au/yacht-club).

We look forward to seeing you there.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email -

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or go to the blogspot - <http://depthouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com.au/>.