

Statement to the Senate on the Retirement of Harry Evans*

Senator the Hon John Hogg, President of the Senate

The longest serving Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, will soon retire. Born 7 February 1946 in Lithgow, New South Wales, Harry went on to study at Sydney University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours. In 1967, Harry commenced as a librarian-in-training with the Parliamentary Library on a salary of \$3239 per annum. By 1969, he had come to the attention of the legendary Jim Odgers, Clerk of the Senate, who wanted to bring out a new edition of his *Australian Senate Practice*. Odgers was looking for a good researcher to work with him on the project. Harry, with his strong interest in history, applied for and got the job. It was this promotion that set up his mastery of Senate Practice—40 years of it!

He became highly regarded as secretary to the Regulations and Ordinances Committee for many years and cut his teeth on executive accountability to the parliament. Upon leaving in 1981, the committee chair, Victorian Liberal Senator Austin Lewis said of him:

... on behalf of the Committee, I wish to pay a special tribute to our former secretary, Mr Harry Evans, who has taken up other duties within the Senate. His vast knowledge, dedication and efficiency have been of inestimable value to the Committee ... Members of the Committee congratulate Mr Evans on his advancement and look forward to his further progress as an officer of the Senate.

* Statement to the Senate, 19 November 2009.

Progress indeed continued. In the early 1980s Harry set up what is now the Procedure Office, in response to the emergence of minor parties in the Senate and their needs for procedural advice and legislative drafting support, in addition to the requirements of the opposition and government.

In 1983, the Appropriations and Staffing Committee approved a new departmental structure as a result of the growth of Senate committee work and the emergence of new functions such as procedural support for minor parties. Several positions of Clerk Assistant were created. Harry was one of the first of these new clerks assistant and was responsible for the Committee Office until he returned to the Procedure Office in 1985, before being promoted to Deputy Clerk in 1987 and Clerk of the Senate the following year.

These were incredibly productive years during which Harry was Senate adviser to the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Privilege; was secretary to the two select committees on the conduct of a judge; was the principal critic of the New South Wales Supreme Court decisions in the case of *R v Murphy*, which provided the immediate catalyst for the *Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987*; was principal instructor in the drafting of the Parliamentary Privileges Bill; revised and redrafted the standing orders to bring them up to date and delete archaic, unused and contradictory provisions; was secretary to the Select Committee on Legislation Procedures, which provided the blueprint for the system of referral of bills to committees which commenced in 1990; and initiated the *Procedural Information Bulletin*, which continues to provide authoritative commentary on those interesting and unusual procedures with which the Senate abounds. He also found time to be an adviser to the Joint Committee on the New Parliament House.

As Clerk, a small sample of Harry's achievements include: rewriting *Australian Senate Practice* as *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice* in 1995 and publishing five further editions; devising innovative procedures for senators, including the bills cut-off order and devising many accountability measures such as the contracts order and the codification of procedures for making public interest immunity claims; championing the independence of the Senate and the Senate's rights under sections 53 and 57 of the Constitution; being a fearless critic of lack of accountability on the part of the executive; leading by example and fostering in the Department of the Senate a culture of excellence in supporting and promoting the work of the Senate; and, importantly, arguing successfully for the abandoning of the old-fashioned wigs and gowns for the clerks. Hear, hear!

Today, it is important, I think, to recall Senator Boswell's prophetic remarks in an end-of-year valedictory in 1990, when he said:

I would like to say a special word about the Clerks. I believe Harry Evans will be one of the great clerks in the history of the Senate.

Few would argue with that. In addition to Harry's record tenure of 21 years as Clerk of the Senate—a record that will never be equalled under the current legislation—Australians have received great value from their tax dollar: Harry's last sick day, I am told, was in July 1988!

Harry, let me say to you that yours has been a unique career and your contribution to this institution unmatched. Today, at least in a small way, this is being acknowledged.

Finally, to me, in my current role as President and for over a decade before this, I have always been taken by your unqualified dedication to this place and the depth of knowledge that accompanies the advice you provide to me and indeed to us all and to those, of course, who have preceded me in my role as President of the Senate. On behalf of all of those, I thank you.

May your deserved retirement serve you and your wife, Rhonda—I am pleased to see that Rhonda has joined us—and your family well into the future. We wish you all the best.