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"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

Another week...

A week can be a long long time

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It is often said that a week can be a long time in politics, with fortunes changing on an hourly basis at times. Well, if that is true, then a fortnight can seem an eternity. As it must presently seem in both the Federal and State Parliaments.

In the Senate, a rape allegation involving two staffers and a Minister's office back in 2019 has become bigger than Ben Hur, with a storyline that has twisted and turned such as to put British drama series like House of Cards, Midsomer Murders or Vera to shame.

The Minister (Minister R), once having heard the allegation, advised the woman to go the police, which she did. She made a complaint, but soon withdrew it, and requested of those she told that the matter be now treated in confidence. Co-incidentally, an election was looming. Somehow, the Prime Minister was informed or not informed of the allegation depending on who is telling that piece of the puzzle.

After the election she changed her employment to work with a different Minister (Minister C). An Opposition Senator (Senator K), now deceased, heard that something was awry and began to ask questions. Minister R it seems continued to respect the confidence.

However, after 2 years, the woman decided to re-activate her complaint and went to the Police, while at the same time leaving her work and doing a TV interview about the matter. The preparation for that interview was not pleasant, it was gauche and leading in the extreme, and should weigh heavily on the interviewer. It would appear she or an associate also briefed an Opposition Senator (Senator G), now a Minister, and again it would seem in confidence.

The case went to court in October 2022, but the case was abandoned when legal difficulties arose involving the jury. The Commonwealth then settled the matter with the complainant. Now, information given to the police by the complainant has leaked to the media, and it has been on for young and old.

Allegations have continued as to who knew what, and when, and what they did with the information they were given, and this has absorbed the time of the Senate and the media. Out of the blue an outburst from one Senator (A) against another Senator (B), neither of whom were involved in the original situation, has even led to charges of racism by Senator A and the sacking from his Party of Senator B. Criticisms that the case has been weaponised are being thrown around like confetti.

The issue has both fascinated and disturbed the public. So many questions remain, as to the incident itself, the aftermath, the effects of that aftermath and the process that has since been followed. For another place and time, perhaps.

However, I make reference to this series of events, not to apportion blame, but to point out how the real business of government can be sidetracked, even derailed, by matters that although important, are not what parliament should be about. In this case, there are no winners, including the public.

At the local level, the now minority government, a government only tenuously holding on to power, has faced Estimates and has been hounded on a range of topics, including the administration of racing, power pricing, the housing crisis, and the ever-present stadium proposal at Macquarie Point.

On racing. When asked who in the industry the Minister had spoken to, she responded with "my head of Racing" and other regulators. Her reference that she had met with actual operators on a regular basis was exposed as being a significant "gilding of the lily", to put it mildly. She needs to do so much better. Let's hope she has been tackling other elements of her portfolio responsibilities more seriously.

On power pricing. With tariffs going up, the government refuses to cap prices (which was once their policy), saying that prices are going up slower than elsewhere (as if that was a good thing), preferring instead to provide a subsidy on application. What this means of course is yet another bureaucratic process to determine eligibility, but what is worse it provides and fosters a totally uneven playing field within the world of commerce. A world one would have thought this government would have championed. Not good policy, and not good politics.

On the housing crisis. An advertisement is appearing in the media seeking "your feedback" on a Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft to inform the final Tasmanian Housing Strategy. The Exposure Draft is a document of 48 pages filled with pictures and all the right platitudes and sentiments, but the proof of the pudding is not writing more drafts and having more public consultations – that has all been done (to death) and has so far produced a nice series of glossy booklets.

In fact, the document acknowledges 22 other Plans and Strategies, with which it is "related", not to mention 8 further "co-ordinated strategies" which are presently being developed. Seems to be a world of Plans and Strategies.

Now, with the housing crisis well and truly upon us, how about stepping away from the comfort zone of submissions, consultations, plans, strategies and reports and ... just DO IT!

On the stadium. The questions kept on coming - What information did the Premier have at his fingertips when he signed the deal with the AFL? What information should he have had which he didn't have? When did the stadium become a pre-condition for an AFL side? Who wears the cost if things do not go according to plan? What is included and what is excluded from the cost estimate (e.g., port upgrade, housing precinct etc.... The Premier's response? - It's all about jobs! Actually, it isn't!

And Mac Pt? The new CEO of the Macquarie Point Development Corporation was interviewed on radio recently, and when asked what was happening now that the stadium was "in the mix" talked of the need for a precinct plan, a high level visual plan to inform and update the masterplan, a need to resolve a wastewater pipeline going through the stadium precinct and yes, opportunities for ongoing public engagement via a questionnaire on the MPDC website. To which can be added "a design process", "a planning process" and "alternative delivery options". Goodness!

And the critical question was not asked, which was "With all this new activity you are engaged in with the stadium now a centre-piece, what if the stadium does not go ahead?"

Now I don't want to be disingenuous here, and no doubt this new CEO is sincere in what she says, but haven't we heard all this before. Echoes of 2013. It all sounds so very familiar. Mac Pt would seem to be a place where jobs are created, reports are written, money is spent, but not much else.

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