Oral Histories: John Quirke

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Interview held in the Kingston Room, Old Parliament House, on Monday 16 February 2026 at 11am

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John Andrew Quirke, Interviewee

CLEM MACINTYRE: John Quirke, member for Playford in the House of Assembly from 1989 to 1997, and then subsequently in the Australian Senate for three years from 1997, welcome. Thank you for making yourself available for our talk today.

JOHN QUIRKE: Thank you.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What I would like to do is start off by going back to your very early life, where you were born and a bit about your early education and family. You were born in the UK, I understand?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, I was born in Birkenhead, which is sort of Liverpool South—it's the other side of the Mersey that The Beatles used to sing about—in 1950 to a predominantly Irish family. My mother was born in Ireland. My father was half Irish. His father had joined the British Army to evade virtually being penniless, which is a separate story.

I grew up in that area. I went to a place called Rock Ferry Convent for my first schooling because my mother was a mad Irish Catholic. It was what I now call the Sisters of No Mercy, rather than the Sisters of Mercy. After a couple of years there of almost a nervous breakdown—because they were hard, hard women—the doctor recommended that I be taken out of there, so I went to another school. Then eventually I went to the local school, which was called Bromborough Pool.

My mother was an agoraphobic, and that used to come in waves, so she used to keep me home to keep her company. My father had wanted to come to Australia because he rode out the Great Depression in India and Burma and points to the east. Although he had a good job in the shipyard at Cammell Laird's—he was a foreman there—he had always wanted to go to a warmer climate and a country that would have more future for him.

Eventually, my mother rolled over and said she would do it, largely because the truant officer had been around 12 times and had said that the next time he comes she was going to be prosecuted. To avoid the truant officer, we emigrated in 1959—6th January, to be precise—and came to Australia.

I learnt a lot on the way on the ship. I had seen pictures and maps of the British Empire and all these lovely little places that loved Britain and all the rest of it. When I got there, I found out that was nonsense. The first place we had to be very careful in was Cyprus. The ship sailed off the coast of Cyprus. The migrants who were coming from Cyprus had to come out by rowing boat. It was not safe for the ship to tie up there.

Then we went to Port Said, and we were not allowed off the ship because the British had invaded there two and a bit years earlier. Then from there we went down to a place called Djibouti, which was a former French part of Somalia that they had carved off, and then to Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, through all the various things and arrived eventually in Cabramatta hostel on 12 February 1959.

I was 8½. I went to the local school. I didn't go there that often, again, for various reasons, usually my mother, so the truant officer was around again. From that, we came down to South Australia to get me out of the hostel. I ran a couple of youth gangs there. We used to steal lead for our shanghais and all that stuff. Anyway, we came down here to South Australia. I was here for about a year or so, and I finally went to school. I missed most of that year of school. I did one term at Walkerville Primary School and then we moved to Henley Beach. I didn't go to school at all at Henley Beach, and we were there for about eight months.

We then went back to New South Wales. Eventually, I went to Blacktown Primary School and did one term of year 3, which was good. It was very good for me because the teacher there was absolutely adamant on people spelling correctly, so I really learned thoroughly how to spell words—not grammar but spell words. Eventually, the truant officer was around again. We came down here, down to part of Adelaide, and for about eight months I didn't go to school at all. No-one hassled us.

Then we went to a Housing Trust place in Elizabeth, at Elizabeth Park. I finally went to school there. I owed a great deal of debt to the principal there, a fellow called Woithe; I don't remember his first name. He took a look at my age and said I could not go into year 3 or anything like that at my age then, so he put me into year 5. Within a term, I had caught up with all the others and I was getting merit cards. I did pretty well.

The next year, we moved to Elizabeth Downs. I went to Elizabeth Downs Primary School, which was its first year of operation. When I left there, the next time I would go back would be on a parliamentary committee to discover poverty, but that's a separate issue. Anyway, I went there. My mother wanted me to go to Elizabeth Boys Tech, which I went to. I got expelled from that at the end of year 8. The reason I was expelled was I had missed 178 days.

On the last day of term, I was sent down with the roll book to see the deputy principal, a fellow by the name of Phillips. He went through it all and said to me he was going to recommend prosecution of my parents. The truant officer and I knew each other well; his name was Mr Nicholls. The bottom line to it was that I said, 'You can't, because I'm 14. This is the last day of term. Let me make it clear to you: I am no longer obliged to go to school.' I knew the law. He said, 'In that case'—and he gave me a piece of paper—'you're out of here.'

From that, I went to Elizabeth High School. I finished at Elizabeth High School. By the middle of my high school years, my mother had got much worse. It was a very bad move for her to come to Australia. She had no family here.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you have siblings?

JOHN QUIRKE: I had an elder sister and a younger sister. My younger sister was actually my niece; my elder sister had had a child out of wedlock. Anyway, the bottom line to it was that we approached a very old woman down the road who had come out to be with her family. She was in her late 70s. She used to come up and keep my mother company every day so I could go to school. So, I graduated from school. Having added it all up several times, Clem, I did six years of school total in primary and secondary. Everyone else did 12: I did six. I got into Adelaide University. I was going to be a student teacher, but that didn't quite work out.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We will come back to university in a minute, but that early life: was the family political in a way that we would understand it today? Were your parents interested in politics? Did you talk about politics at home?

JOHN QUIRKE: Absolutely. My father was very, very interested in politics and used to talk a lot of politics at work as well, but not Labor politics: it was the other side. My mother was a Liberal voter in Britain, which stemmed from the Irish connection. It goes all the way back to the original Liberal Party over there. My father was a conservative through and through. I must say that the women in the family, my sister and my mother, were swayed by Don Dunstan. They thought he was pretty good. Whether they ever voted for him or not, I don't know.

But, yes, over the dinner table there was lots of talk about politics, about Vietnam, which was coming at that time, and about Harold Holt and whether or not he was taken by a Chinese submarine, or whatever all that was at the time. There was virtually nothing about football, cricket or any of the usual topics that you would expect.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Your politics was shaped by the sort of public events of the time, things like Vietnam and so on. I am guessing you were, even if not thinking it in so many words, aligning yourself more on the Labor side in contrast to your parents?

JOHN QUIRKE: That's absolutely correct. The Vietnam War had a big impact on me. To me, even looking back on it now, obviously it was an anti-colonial war that America had blundered into, because Ho Chi Minh was communist, and at that time it dawned on me that the Americans were not fighting in Algeria, they were not fighting in a whole pile of other places that wanted their independence. So Vietnam became an issue for me. I went to a number of student meetings, even when I was in high school. There was a thing called Students for a Democratic Australia, and another

one, STS, and there would be about six of us there, but the bottom line was that I met a number of interesting people there, including some people in your department that were around.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you were becoming a bit of a political activist even in your youth then?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, very much so. At high school, in my last couple of years there, I was known for it and that got me notoriety amongst most of the other students there, because these were hot topics of debate at that time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes. So despite this sort of rather uneven school record you were able to be admitted to the university?

JOHN QUIRKE: I got in the first intake to the university, which was surprising because I didn't get a brilliant matric but I got a reasonable one. They didn't give you the numbers in those days, but they gave you the number of subjects and I was in with the first entry. I had in year 12 taken a $200 scholarship from the education department where I would then go to Adelaide Teachers College and do university and then do a DipEd and then go and teach anywhere they would send me for three years. However, having got into the university I never heard from the Teachers College.

So it went into January, and by now I am doing lots of other jobs as well. In my last few years of school I had to work to get the money—my family didn't have it—so I did odd jobs during the year and then in the holidays I would work as a builders' labourer. Anyway, I went down to the education building, which was a four-storey building then, not the 18-storey thing now, and saw one clerk after another until I finally got to the head of secondary education, a man called Hedley Beare, who had got a doctorate on the basis of a thesis, as I understand it, of how you could put a school in a high-rise building. I don't think anyone took it seriously, but they gave him a doctorate.

Anyway, he told me that I was not going to go to university on their money. It was a Thursday, so I went out and I thought: what do I do? Well, down the road was the Public Service recruiting office. I went down and signed up. I started the following Monday morning in what was then the health department. That was the old State Bank building on the corner of Pulteney and what is now Rundle Mall—it wasn't Rundle Mall then. I was a base grade clerk. I went up and I started on a Monday morning and I met Mr Mole, who was one of the many bosses in there. He had been there since 1933 and he was well named!

The bottom line to it all was that I had to go and collect the mail from the post office every morning. In those days people had to pay for their medical stuff, and I would be carrying literally—this is early 1970—three-quarters of a million dollars in cash back from the post office in a locked bag up to the office. I would have to open all the mail. I learned a lot about the Public Service in this job. There were eight bosses on the floor that had to sign in, because this is before flex time, and there were three that didn't, and that included Mr Mole.

They were all scattered on the different floors. I had to deliver their mail in order of seniority, so I would go down one set of stairs, drop the mail and go back up and then go around. This, I thought, was ridiculous. I got called into Mr Mole's office to meet him. Two things happened there. The first one was I had a beard by now because I used to like to go into a hotel for a drink, and the drinking age was then 21. If you had a beard, they didn't ask you.

So I had a beard. Mr Mole looked at me and my immediate boss and he said, 'I am not sure I can get used to beards on office boys.' I said, 'Well, it grew on me, mate.' He then turned to my immediate boss, who was shaking, and he said, 'Don't let your sideburns get any lower.' I thought, 'This is good fun.' The second thing I had to do is Mr Mole had a private toilet and, every Monday morning, whether it was needed or not, I had to change his toilet roll. My father said to me that night, 'I knew you would start out at the bottom, son!' I did that job for about three or four days and I thought, 'I can do better than this.'

My mother got a phone call. They had got me mixed up at Adelaide Teachers College, and they wanted to know if I would still be prepared to go there. This was actually one of the last phone calls before she would die. She would be dead in a few weeks. Anyway, I went down to pick up my piece of paper from there, and I saw Dr Beare again, who took me into his office and said, because he didn't want to back down, 'You are not going to university on our money.'

There must have been someone else there because I told him where he could go and what he could do when he got there, and they pulled what I had said to him out to me several times in my

career later. I thought, 'What will I do?' One of the bosses there was a nice lady who let me use their phone to organise a builder's labourer job for myself starting the next week.

On the Friday of that week, I told her to make sure she was on time on Monday morning, because one of my jobs was to rule a little red line in a book at 8.42 to make sure they were all in. She got in, and the other seven got their pay docked. I got called into Mole's office and he told me that I wasn't going to get anywhere in the Public Service, that I would be up before the Public Service Board. I just said to him, 'That will be an interesting case, won't it? I am told to do a job, I am paid to do a job and you are threatening me.' He said, 'You won't get very far.' I said, 'No, I am leaving at 5 o'clock this afternoon anyway.'

I then went and built a school called Craigmore. Well, I didn't build it. I was a builder's labourer at the bottom of the pit. I went to university. In those days, you had to pay your fees up-front.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you were working part-time as a builder's labourer and going to university at the same time?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, I worked as a builder's labourer until the university started, then I worked as a telephone operator, long before there were answering machines. I worked odd jobs on the Saturday and Sunday of each week, and then I got a full-time job with a company called Austas, which started answering phones at night, at 10 o'clock, and finished at eight the next morning. I worked full-time at that and in the university holidays worked as a labourer again, right through. I got my degree in three years.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That's impressive. While you were at university, it sounds like, if you were working so many hours, you probably didn't have a lot of time for clubs and societies and political activity at university.

JOHN QUIRKE: Lots of time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You still managed that?

JOHN QUIRKE: I made lots of time. I made a big thing of being with the moratorium, including the one that was busted on 18 September 1970, where I was one of the marshals with a number of other people, including Lynn Arnold, who was a friend of mine through this period. Literally all of my university lecturers were there. Lynn was arrested and so was the Professor of Philosophy from Flinders, Brian Medlin, but I don't think any of the Adelaide ones were there. But I walked up the street with Peter Byrnes and a number of others. I was quite active with that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were you a member of the Labor Party at university at that stage?

JOHN QUIRKE: No.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It was just sort of the focus on the political issues of the time.

JOHN QUIRKE: And the hard left. I had become a hard lefty. That was it. I didn't see or talk a lot of politics with my father because after my mother died he would fly to Woomera for three-week stints working there. I think he would have been horrified with my politics at that time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you have political ambitions then? Did you see a future in political life, or was it something you hadn't thought about really much beyond the university?

JOHN QUIRKE: The answer to that is that there was an inkling there to maybe do it one day, but not immediately, but to establish a career first.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you graduated from university with teaching qualifications.

JOHN QUIRKE: No, I graduated with a degree, and in those days you didn't have to have teaching qualifications to get a job as a teacher. At the end of that time I knocked off from a shift and I went down to the education building, and I went in and I saw a fellow by the name of John Lewis, who had me in his office for three hours and we talked about everything, literally everything, except qualifications. I said to him at 10 to five, realising I had got a parking ticket by then, 'Have I got a job?' He said, 'Sure, you've got a job. What qualifications have you got?' I said, 'I've got a degree.' He said, 'You're the only one all week. Come on Monday morning and you'll see Mr Mayfield, who will give you a choice of schools to go to.'

I worked over the weekend, knocked off at the telephone exchange at eight in the morning and went around to see Mr Mayfield, who didn't get up very early in the morning, so there was another

fellow there by the name of Maynard, who was universally known as 'Jack the Bastard'. If any teacher was a problem, they got sent to Jack.

I went to sit down in Jack's office and he said, 'Who said you could sit down?' I thought, 'Here we go.' Then he took out this thing and he said, 'You told Hedley Beare,' and related all—and he said, 'I don't know why you're here.' I said, 'I'm here because I want a job and I was told I had one.' He said, 'How dare you! You work full time,' and I said, 'Don't let it get around, but I have to eat, I have to pay university fees and I've got to feed my younger sister.' I said, 'The guy in the corner office over there has a much nicer office than you, and he said I had a job. So I suspect he's your boss,' and he said, 'You'll do fine. Just be like that when you go to the school.'

He said, 'Look, here's a list of schools. Where do you want to go?' and I said, 'I'll go to the one that I built,' which was Craigmore. I went out there for four years before I went to work at Concordia College as a private school teacher, which I did for nine more years. By then, that glimmer of a political career became more. I formally joined the Labor Party in 1979, having got rid of most of my lefty stuff, baggage, by then.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What was the tipping point? What you made you think it was time to take this a bit more seriously and join a mainstream political party?

JOHN QUIRKE: In my teaching years, virtually from the beginning, I would hand out for the Labor Party at elections. Gough, of course, came in and brought in free university, which I thought was absolutely wonderful and I still think that was the best move that was ever done. At that stage all I did was help the local branch on election days and so on, but I took the view when the Tonkin government was elected in 1979 that I should formally join the Labor Party.

I took the view then that the left of the Labor Party was actually a liability, so I joined what was then the Centre Left. There was virtually no right in the South Australian Labor Party at that stage. I joined the local branch and graduated to being a delegate, to being President, to being all that stuff in the early 1980s.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you were active within the branch and seeking elected office and so on?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, straightaway.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you at that stage have in mind standing as a candidate at one point or was that still something that was—

JOHN QUIRKE: It was still in the mist, if I can put it that way. I wasn't sure where it would go. I would in fact still teach through until 1985, but by then I had met a large number of people in the Labor Party who looked after me well, if I can put it that way. One was a fellow called Senator Reg Bishop. Reg, of course, is the man who got rid of your television licences. Reg sought me out and we were inseparable for four or five years.

Mick Young, who was a very prominent member of the Labor Party, became a very close friend of mine. He organised a job for me with a senator called Dominic Foreman. I started that on 25 August 1985. I was to be Dominic's speechwriter. He was told not to make any speeches! My real job was to be a factional warrior to make sure that the left did not control the South Australian Labor Party, which at that stage they did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Who were the dominant figures in the left faction then?

JOHN QUIRKE: Peter Duncan. Nicky Bolkus was as well. They were united then; they would split later. Duncan, now the Wortleys who are with the right now, but that's a separate issue, and I am trying to think of some of the others but—

CLEM MACINTYRE: But Peter Duncan was the main—

JOHN QUIRKE: The main one, yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And on the Centre Left, the key figures were?

JOHN QUIRKE: Neal Blewett, who was the then member for Bonython, Mick Young, of course—I don't know that Reg ever formally joined a faction. I would see Reg three or four times a week and I would go and have lunch every Friday where he and Clyde Cameron and a number of others would have lunch in a Chinese restaurant in Hindley Street.

CLEM MACINTYRE: This was the early 1980s?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes. When I got the job with Dominic, within a few weeks I am in Canberra, backwards and forwards, and I get a summons around to a fellow at that stage who was a backbencher but would very be significant later, to meet Robert Ray, who would go on to be Minister for Defence for about nine years. The other one was my good friend Graham Richardson, who died last year. They wanted to meet me because Mick had told them that I was the one who was going to make sure that the branch didn't veer any further to the left in South Australia.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Then I think in 1984 you stood as a candidate in Mayo?

JOHN QUIRKE: In Mayo, yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Clearly, Mayo was a seat which the Liberals would expect to win. I think it was a new seat in that election.

JOHN QUIRKE: It was.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were there any expectations on your part that you would win or was it just flying the flag?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, it was something that I thought I would do; I never thought that I would win it. I wanted to get a reasonable vote so that that thing in the distance, maybe one day it would get there. I believe—I am not sure it's correct now—I got the highest ever Labor vote in Mayo, and that's Alexander Downer who told me that and I believe it's correct. The reason for it was that I was teaching at Concordia, which was a German heritage school—much more then than now—and I actually won boxes that the Labor Party had never won before, like in Hahndorf and places like that.

There was a fellow up there, not in Hahndorf but a neighbouring town, who was a Lutheran pastor who used to preach hellfire and damnation on the Labor Party. The Labor branch up there said, 'You'll have trouble with him'. I said, 'I don't think so'. He never opened his mouth about me because I taught both of his kids.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A good local connection.

JOHN QUIRKE: That was it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What did you learn in that campaign in terms of the importance of organisation and boots on the ground and so on? What were the lessons that came to you as a candidate?

JOHN QUIRKE: You have to cover every box. You have to go out and meet the people. Wherever you got the opportunity to do it—doorknocking and stuff like that, although in a large electorate there is only a limited amount of doorknocking you can do. I did meet some interesting people on the doors. I was working full-time as a teacher, and the school gave me time off to go and do this. I remember meeting a fellow from the education department who said, 'We wouldn't have let you do that.' I said, 'Well, you wouldn't get me working after hours either for you.'

From then on I was given time off from the school to go on to a thing called the national policy committee for defence and I became a bit of a defence expert—people would defer to me on it. I was quite regularly going interstate for meetings and the school gave me time off on full pay to do it as they found me useful as a connection.

CLEM MACINTYRE: If I am right, a candidate in Alexandra as well?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes. The local branch down there, after the 1984 federal election, wanted me to run. I thought that it would not hurt me to do that, so I did it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Was Mayo overlapping with that electorate?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, it was. Alexandra was right in the middle of Mayo.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And you had built a bit of a profile for yourself through the 1984 campaign?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: But, again, it was a safe Liberal seat?

JOHN QUIRKE: Oh, yes; Ted Chapman had it. The interesting thing about it was that, when I analysed all the boxes after the election, I had virtually won no box but got a reasonably good vote. The interesting thing about it was that in Coles Bay, which was one of the smaller parts of Kangaroo Island, there were 47 Liberal voters in that box, four Labor voters and seven for the Australian Democrats. That was in the Mayo election, I should say.

The next year there were 47 Liberal voters, eight Democrats and only three for the Labor Party. I was worried at how I had lost 25 per cent of the vote. The candidate for the Democrats had voted for me the year before and then voted for himself the next year. I amused Bill Hayden immeasurably with that, because I went to a foreign affairs and defence committee meeting after the election, and Bill just couldn't believe the results that were there. After that I thought that hopefully next time I will get a bit more. At that stage the branch in South Australia was not necessarily going to support people of my ilk.

CLEM MACINTYRE For a safe seat?

JOHN QUIRKE: For any seat. The left were out to get their people up and that would be the same. It was three or four years of work of making sure branches elected the right delegates; it is called branch stacking now. But I actively got involved with that with teams of people and eventually in 1988 it was put to me that the seat of Playford might be coming up.

CLEM MACINTYRE Where were you living at that time?

JOHN QUIRKE: At Mount Lofty and the branch there and Playford, of course, centres around Para Hills, Ingle Farm and up there.

CLEM MACINTYRE So the northern parts of Adelaide, rather than the south-east.

JOHN QUIRKE: That's right. There was a battle in the Labor Party for who was going to be the state secretary and I supported Terry Cameron and got him elected. Terry died about four years ago. Terry said to me that it would be a good idea to think about that seat, so I went and bought a house out there and set up shop out there for about 18 months.

The pre-selection came up and it was a controversial pre-selection, to say the least. The previous member was trying to get his mate up and when they did not have the numbers for that the Peter Duncan left wanted anybody but me, so they put all their effort behind this fellow, who I sadly say I saw—I still read the death notices every day; it was part of my lower house training—has died, about six weeks ago.

But I won the pre-selection for that and again it was controversial and it was a sign of what was coming. By then the right of the ALP was starting to emerge out of what was the shoppies union. They were getting a little stronger. They had a couple of other smaller unions, medium-sized ones.

CLEM MACINTYRE But you were still aligned with Centre Left at that point?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE Okay, so you were pre-selected as the candidate for Playford. It is a safe seat, one that there is every expectation you would win. There was the process of getting local support and finding people to work on the campaign and so on. You had been living there for 18 months. Was it you sort of taking the lead there, or were there significant figures in the branch who were, in effect, working hard on that campaign for you?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, I ran it. My predecessor there had not bothered. He had been there for 20 years. There was one episode when I had a branch meeting. When I moved in, the branch had 31 members and within 12 months it had 529. Peter Duncan and his mates were out signing up their people, but I was signing up mine.

It came to a head when I looked like I would lose the numbers, but I had helped the local Vietnamese Christian community get a church out there and the priest and the nun who looked after it went around and signed up 120 members for me. I put them in the branch and when that particular meeting took place Peter thought he had the numbers. He turned up with his wife and six bottles of champagne and he left with the champagne unopened because I had clearly won. I can thank the Vietnamese Christian community, which I helped many times out there. Playford became one of the biggest branches.

CLEM MACINTYRE So you were elected in the—

JOHN QUIRKE: In the 1989 election.

CLEM MACINTYRE —1989 election. I was going to say 1988, but it was late 1989. You were familiar with the parliament. You had been in here, I assume, many times and so on. It was not a sort of mystery place for you, but what was the feeling that you had when you first arrived here as an elected member?

JOHN QUIRKE: Let me think about that for a minute. I had not been down here that often. I had only been here a few times. I remember a couple of times I had come in here and coming in I was treated like dirt by some of the staff. Then suddenly, as soon as it is in the newspaper that I am preselected, I came in here and the attitude changed pretty considerably. I had not been in here that often. I had been much more in Canberra. I had been there in the old Parliament House in Canberra for three years. I used to fly out there, if not every week every other week. Then the new Parliament House in Canberra—I went through all that.

My old friends Reg Bishop, Jim Toohey—who was another well-known Labor identity at that stage—and others and I would meet regularly. So while I came down here, it was a case of see how it goes. My first seat was in what was known as 'cobweb corner'.

CLEM MACINTYRE: In the chamber?

JOHN QUIRKE: In the chamber. I was put there by the Whip, who had been the Speaker before, and for all sorts of reasons he wasn't fond of me. The opposition would quite often yell out if I got up to speak, 'Why are you in cobweb corner, John?' I would pretend to dust the cobwebs off and say, 'Well may you ask. Ask the Whip.' So he stopped that; I shifted three or four seats. As I graduated here in the Bannon government, it would be fair to say that I was not Bannon's pick. Bannon didn't want me even though we had been friends 20 years earlier. He went out of his way to try to stop my preselection and so I was frozen out of most things. I was on the Public Works Committee for a year and then, sadly, I got put on the Social Development Committee for eight months.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We will come to that in a minute. I just want to go back to those early days in the parliament. Do you remember the first speech you made?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, it was my maiden speech. I got up and talked about the future of South Australia, that we had to broaden our interests and in particular not to rely just on the car industry because we may not have it one day. That went through and it went reasonably well.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you have family and friends in the gallery?

JOHN QUIRKE: My great wife is always there, as she is today. At that stage my son, who is here now, hadn't come along. We hadn't had him but she was there. Reg Bishop came. I think Jim Toohey came. I think there were a few others there, and that was it. I think the speech was reasonably well received. A number of members of the Liberal Party came up afterwards and introduced themselves to me.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I had a look at the speech. You talked a lot about the trip you had made to Japan and Korea after the election but before taking up the seat. That caused a bit of controversy at the time.

JOHN QUIRKE: It was a very silly thing to do, but I did it and I lived with it and thought the best thing was to confront it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, you said in the speech that it was probably a mistake but that you learned a lot on that trip and were able to bring it back to your deliberations on local politics, particularly industry.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So you were a brand-new member in the house, you said you were placed in 'cobweb corner' by the Whip. That was John Trainer, was it?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Offices—were you sharing an office with someone?

JOHN QUIRKE: In fact, when I came in there was a paucity of offices around the place. Anyway, the Whip decided that I was going to share an office with a lefty. That was done to make my life miserable.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Who was that?

JOHN QUIRKE: A fellow called Vic Heron. Vic has now died. Anyway, Vic took one look at me and decided he didn't want to do that so Vic ran and so I had my own office. I worried I didn't have the right deodorant or whatever but I had my own office. The Whip eventually changed that to put another person in my office, who was in there for three hours until I was elected Chair of Economic and Finance, and then I got my own office again. So I made much of that. While Bannon, when he left as Premier, had to share an office with Don Hopgood and put up with Don's playing of the trumpet every night, I had my own office and it was great.

CLEM MACINTYRE: This was in the late 80s/very early 90s—at the beginning, I suppose, of information technology and so on. When it came to running a local electorate office in Playford, the communication with electors and with colleagues and so on, was that still phones and fax and published newsletters going out into letterboxes, that sort of thing? Being a local member, the communication and the engagement with voters and so on: what was the sense of how that worked?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was phones, phones and phones, and no fax.

CLEM MACINTYRE: No fax, okay.

JOHN QUIRKE: I can tell you that. However, I made sure that I went to every school council meeting there. My wife was a great supporter. She went to formally run in some of the schools. Our eldest boy went to one of the local schools and she was on the school committee for that. I made sure I got to all of those. I got to the high schools; I didn't have any kids there. Interestingly, the high schools had some teachers, principals and deputy principals who I had worked with when I worked in the education department.

Yes, I used to send a regular newsletter out; I made sure that went everywhere. If anything was being opened I made sure I was there for it, and I also took the view that I actually had to get things done for my electorate. I got some roads done. I got a nice set of roads done down in Pooraka and through that area there. I got a lot of that by being on the Public Works Committee for the first year or so of being here.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You had an electorate office based in the electorate, in Playford?

JOHN QUIRKE: Well, no. In fact, when I was first elected, the office was in someone else's electorate, so the first thing I did—

CLEM MACINTYRE: As a result of boundary changes, was it?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was the previous member who didn't want to move, I think, and his electorate secretary at that stage quite liked the office; it suited her. However, as soon as I came there I made it clear that we were moving, and that was on day one. My wife actually found a nice office, which was in Playford, in the Ingle Farm area in the little shops there. The department rented that office and that became the new Playford office. It was next to the medical centre, so it had a good profile.

CLEM MACINTYRE: When parliament wasn't sitting, would you spend a lot of time there?

JOHN QUIRKE: All the time. I made sure that I was there as often as people wanted. There were lots of people who would come and see me at different times, but particularly on a Friday. Friday was the day that you visited. You would have all sorts of issues come up and I would pursue them.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Back to the parliament, you obviously got a bit of experience from having worked in Canberra for a senator and so on. Finding your feet, as it were, in terms of procedures and rules and the way the place was run, was that much of a challenge?

JOHN QUIRKE: Not really.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Was there any mentor or somebody who took you in hand and tried to show you the ropes, or was it just find your own feet?

JOHN QUIRKE: That's it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A lot of members have said it was.

JOHN QUIRKE: In fairness to all that, there were a lot of new members come in in 1989. There had been a redistribution during the Steele Hall government, which led in the 1970 election to a large number of Labor Party identities coming in. By 1989, they were either all leaving or all had left, with the exception of Don Hopgood on our side, so I was one of a number of new Labor MPs.

CLEM MACINTYRE: There was obviously no induction or on-the-job training to familiarise yourself with process?

JOHN QUIRKE: The Clerks organised something. I went to a couple of those meetings, and that was it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you enjoy sitting in the chamber during general debates and so on?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, I thought it was great.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I am just thinking of the composition of the chamber. In 1989, of course, the Bannon government was returned, but it was dependent upon the support of Peterson and Martyn Evans.

JOHN QUIRKE: They won 22 seats there, and two Labor Independents. I made it my work to bring those two back into the Labor Party or to organise, in Norm's case, for him to go at the next election.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So they had both won as Independent Labor candidates effectively in what would normally be safe Labor seats?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, they had been there a while. I took the view that we needed to bring them back into the Labor Party or secure their seats. I spent a year doing that, and I was successful.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Through that parliament, every vote counted. The government literally could have fallen if a single vote was lost. Did that add to any sense of pressure or requirement to maintain discipline for you? Were you thinking of yourself a bit more independently, as a bit more maverick perhaps than just as a foot soldier, there to be what sometimes in the UK we call 'lobby fodder', just to walk through and vote the right way, or were you trying to establish a bit more of an independent position for yourself?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, I already had the independent position because the Bannon mob there didn't want me, and they made that fairly clear. If they didn't, all you had to do was buy a copy of the *Sunday Mail*. There was a fellow called Randall Ashbourne, who would regularly run a story in there about me and why I shouldn't have what I have got, why I shouldn't get anything else and all the rest of it, so, yes, I was instantly a maverick as soon as I came in.

However, the answer to your question is that I made sure I was here for every vote. There were a couple of occasions when the Whip would literally be ripping his hair out because he would be worried about someone else, but he never had to worry about me for a vote. I was always there for it. What I found, though, was on one occasion my eldest boy got badly injured at school. A swing hit him on the head, and we were worried he had concussion. I got the phone call. I couldn't find our Whip, so I found the Liberal Whip, who was Stan Evans. He said, 'You can go. I will guarantee you a pair.' I then found that Stan was excellent to deal with. When Stan passed a few months ago, I rang his son up, who served with me later, and told him what I have just told you now. We all trusted Stan.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That sense of engagement across the floor—members will often talk about you can be having a fierce battle in the chamber and then back in the dining room shortly afterwards there is broad friendship and camaraderie and so on. Did you sense that? Were you involved with members from the other side much or spend much time with them?

JOHN QUIRKE: The short answer to your question is I am having lunch with three or four members tomorrow who served with me on both sides. The answer is yes. What you found is that it was the theatre in parliament. Then you would go out and you would sit with various people. By now I don't have the executive agenda because I was part of the government, but you would sit with the members of the opposition and you would try to sort out arrangements.

I had been in here only a few months when Graham Gunn came up to me, who is now a lifelong friend; he's a bloke I am having lunch with tomorrow. He said he was Gunn by name and gun by nature. We became very close friends. We would go on shooting trips together. We took Martyn Evans on one, and that's when I convinced Martyn Evans to come back to the Labor Party.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So Graham Gunn was part of the circumstances, in a sense, when you were talking with Martyn Evans and trying to shore up the numbers?

JOHN QUIRKE: I took the view that if anyone else wasn't bothering with it, I would. In fairness, Terry Groom had been a very close friend of Martyn Evans. I had tried to convince Bannon to bring Martyn back in. Martyn's problem was that he was worried that he had to go and throw himself at the mercy of convention, that that would mean that the left of the party in particular might have a go at him, even though, I point out, he was actually a friend of Peter Duncan. The two of them were friends together, so it was not quite as hard as it was between me and Peter Duncan.

So I said to him when we were at Arkaroola, 'What if the national executive put you in at 5 o'clock one night and you are a member at 9 o'clock the next morning?' He said, 'If you can do that, I will do it.' Bingo, it was done. I had the numbers on the national executive to do it.

I took the view when I came in here that we were going to have problems with the next election. Then, of course, you had State Bank, SGIC and a whole series of things like that. So I spent the last year and a half, two years, making sure I turned every post into a winner to survive the next election, and I was one of 10 that did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, that's right. Norm Peterson, of course, stood for the upper house in that 1993 election and didn't do very well. Was that part of your discussion with him?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, that was Don Ferguson. Norm Peterson went.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I thought he stood as a candidate.

JOHN QUIRKE: No.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Okay, my apologies.

JOHN QUIRKE: You could have it right, but I am pretty sure it's not.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Anyway, that wasn't part of your discussion.

JOHN QUIRKE: Don Ferguson, of course, was the member for Henley Beach. Don had cancer. He actually lived for another 20 years, but he was very seriously ill. In the run-up to the election, I and my group overwhelmingly had the numbers, and I told every lower house MP, 'You are staying exactly where you are, and that includes me.' The only exception to that was Don Ferguson. We let Don run for what would later be an unwinnable position in the upper house.

CLEM MACINTYRE: From memory, there were preselection arguments with Terry Groom, weren't there?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, there were. Terry had already jumped seats a couple of times. He was organising to take the seat of Napier, and I said no.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Annette Hurley was the candidate; is that right?

JOHN QUIRKE: She became the candidate, yes. That was a deal that I did with what was then the fledgling right of the Labor Party so that they would support the rest of the centre candidates. We had a very heavy preselection in the beginning of March 1992. We had three senators coming out and only two were going to go back. We also had to arrange who was going to get what seat where. Terry Groom wanted Napier and unfortunately for Terry I said no.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So the factional alignments by the end of that parliament had shifted a bit. You were, I think, publicly identified as moving to the right faction?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, not then; that was later. What happened was that—

CLEM MACINTYRE: Because there were newspaper reports talking about you moving from the Centre Left to the right faction in—yes, you are right, in about 1995.

JOHN QUIRKE: To be precise, it was 26 September 1995.

CLEM MACINTYRE: My apologies. So the 1993 election, obviously Labor takes a real beating, reduces, you say, to 10 seats. It wins one back at a by-election shortly afterwards. The mood inside the party room, as you gathered after that election, what was that like?

JOHN QUIRKE: Shock. Not awe, but shock. On the night of the election I did Chris Kenny's program and he asked me at the beginning of the night how I thought the Labor Party would go. I

said we would be lucky to have 10 seats. By accident, I was precisely right. He gave me a bottle of wine, but of course I don't drink, and he signed it and said, 'You were right.' The 1993 election was probably the worst period I have seen the Labor Party in. It was obvious it was coming from 10 February 1991 when the State Bank announcement came out. It was pretty clear that—I thought we would not win the 1993 election, but then it was obvious that it was going to be a debacle. Of course, you had SGIC on top of that, Scrimber, Marineland, which didn't get very much publicity, but there was a whole string of financial disasters that came through.

CLEM MACINTYRE: In terms of beginning to rebuild, you are still a factional warrior in that process?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What was the balance, the factional balance, in the party after the 1993 election?

JOHN QUIRKE: Under the work of Don Farrell, he had revolutionised what was a small part of the right. They had a couple of small unions: the brush makers, the ASE, the shoppies was the biggest one, and he organised that. I did a deal with him. I had met him years earlier and supported him over the top of everyone else to run in the federal seat of Adelaide, which he lost in the by-election to Michael Pratt.

It would be fair to say that Farrell and I became lifelong friends at that stage. I organised to make sure there were a number of branches went his way and he would support our candidates in other branches. So the right was emerging and getting stronger. At that stage, I saw my future with them rather than with what was the Centre Left. Anyway, eventually we had a couple of very difficult preselections—one in 1994 and then in 1995—and I formally joined the right then. The interesting thing was that I took almost everyone from the Centre Left. A few stayed in there, like Chris Schacht and that lot, but almost everyone, including people who had not supported me, came with me to join the right in September 1995.

CLEM MACINTYRE: What precipitated that change?

JOHN QUIRKE: The loss of preselection. There was a fellow called Joe Rossi, who was elected here for the Liberal Party. We were going to preselect Leesa Chesser, who was going to win the seat. Unbeknownst to me and around the corner, Michael Wright and Jack Wright, and I think Mick and a few others, had organised for Michael to get the numbers. It was actually the first preselection I lost. I lost that by literally only about three or four votes.

So I thought, 'Well, this vehicle called the Centre Left has now outdone its usefulness.' Mick Young of course had retired six years earlier. So I announced we were going to the right. With the exception of only a couple of delegates who went to the left, the Centre Left dissolved and they all came with me into the right. Preselections are what cause these things, overwhelmingly.

You talked before about Terry wanting the seat of Napier. Terry's cousin was the subeditor of *The Advertiser*, Rex Jory. I became the truck driver. I had driven a truck for the Enfield council for two weeks as part of my paying for university, and I was the truck driver who had too much power. Can I say I got dreadful publicity for weeks and weeks and weeks. I thought, 'This is dreadful for me,' and then I had phone calls from people from all over Australia wanting to meet me, and I realised that all publicity is good publicity, and that helped me.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Were you appointed to a frontbench shadow ministry when Mike Rann took over?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes. In fact, Lynn Arnold was still there.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, for about nine months or so.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes. In actual fact, when the election was over and done with, I was made that shadow minister for welfare and that, and I didn't really want it. Lynn said to me, 'I'm going to make you shadow minister for local government.' I said, 'Well, that's very good, Lynn. I would really like that. I will put a press release out this afternoon saying that I think it should be abolished and in the unlikely event that we win the next election they can come back and talk to me then.' He said, 'You don't want it, do you?' I said, 'No, I don't. I actually want education.'

The teachers union, of which I had been on the executive before, was absolutely adamant that they didn't want me anywhere near education because I have a view that kids should learn to

read and write in schools and not learn to march up and down the road saying that the end of the world is coming. They had tried to blackball me and that was fine, it was alright. A few weeks later, I am shadow treasurer because Martyn Evans is gone, and I became shadow police minister because I had a lifelong interest. I was a competitive shooter.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Did you enjoy those portfolio areas with a focus more on policy than on internal party matters?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, it was good. There was an amazing amount of bipartisanship. The Liberal Party didn't need to talk to us because there were only 10 of us, but they did. The then Treasurer would seek me out and consult with me. On police matters—this is three years before Port Arthur—I had a good relationship with them. I had a good relationship with the police commissioner. I would see him every couple of weeks and he would ask me if there was anything that could be done, and that went on. Then when Port Arthur happened, of course, it was more interesting times.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, certainly in terms of policy development. I suppose we should just say for the record and future historians that Port Arthur involved the killing of about 35 people or so in Tasmania with a shooter. Eventually you leave the seat of Playford and move to the Senate. What was the thinking in that process? Were you thinking your time was not as productive in the South Australian parliament as you might have wanted?

JOHN QUIRKE: I had aimed to be the deputy leader, and a bloke I had put in parliament, despite the fact that he told me he would support me, ratted on me with a few other people. That was alright. I didn't need them because I had the numbers outside of the thing. I remembered my Canberra days and I thought it might be nice to do that.

Anyway, it was out there that I was interested in replacing Dominic Foreman. Dominic was keen for me to do it, and Don Farrell of course contacted me and said that they thought it would be good and that I should do it. It became a bit of publicity around about August of 1996, and David Penberthy, who then wrote for *The Advertiser*, rang me up and he said, 'I am going to do a story that you are not going to get the Senate preselection.' He said, 'Who do I have to ring?' so I gave him a list of names: Senator Chris Schacht, who I had supported to get into the Senate; Rod Sawford, the member for Port Adelaide, who I had put there, and a string of others.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The member for Port Adelaide, yes.

JOHN QUIRKE: Ratting is a good South Australian tradition, as Graham Richardson pointed out to me when we first met. He said, 'What are the numbers?' I said, 'Seventy-one for me and one for the other fellow.' Anyway, he printed the article on my birthday in 1996 and it's the best article I have ever seen on me; it was wonderful. It said how they didn't want me in Canberra and that they wanted to get rid of me from South Australia. I looked at it and I thought, 'What a bastard I must be. This is wonderful!'

So I rang up Penbo and I said, 'This is a wonderful article, mate. I really appreciate it,' and all the rest of it. He rang me up three months later and said, 'I'm going to do an article saying you are going to get the preselection.' I said yes. He said, 'What are the numbers?' I said, 'Seventy-one for me and one for the other guy,' and he wrote that story. I had it wrong: I actually got 72 votes because the other guy decided to vote for me rather than himself. Anyway, that started my career over there.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Certainly there were press reports at the time that Rann and John Hill, who I think was state secretary then, were not unhappy to see you leave the state parliament. Is that a fair call or not?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was John Hill and who?

CLEM MACINTYRE: Mike Rann as the leader.

JOHN QUIRKE: Rann was reasonable enough. I think Rann would have been quite happy for me to go. Rann had been part of John Bannon's gang—very close there—and in fact John was a rather interesting fellow. He was an introvert in what should have been an extrovert job.

CLEM MACINTYRE: This is John Bannon?

JOHN QUIRKE: This is John Bannon. So his image was made by Mike Rann, who was the best image maker I have ever met anywhere in politics. As a consequence of that, Rann was supportive of me. He certainly voted for me to go to the Senate. I believe some of the others were quite happy to see me go for all sorts of reasons.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We won't spend too much time on your life in the Senate because the focus of this is very much the South Australian Parliament.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, that's fine.

CLEM MACINTYRE: I am very curious to know how you found the contrast. You were obviously familiar with the federal parliament—you had been working there for Senator Foreman for some time—but you were going as a member and you were going to an upper house rather than the lower house. I will maybe just get you to reflect on the political culture and the different experience of being a senator in opposition in Canberra to the member for Playford in South Australia for eight-odd years.

JOHN QUIRKE: Clem, the most important point that I want to make in relation to that question is this: I learnt very early on in the piece here, when I chaired a select committee on the Gulf St Vincent prawn fishery, which was something Lynn Arnold wanted me to do—there had been eight inquiries into it, there had been a hell of a mess and I got the job of sorting it out. As there haven't been anymore inquiries, I guess I did it. What I found here was that the Public Service would always try to get someone in to the committee to rort how it would happen. The old English public service tradition didn't exist in state politics, at least in Adelaide, in South Australia.

When I chaired that committee—by the way when I was called down to Lynn's office for it I had been frozen out by Bannon from most things. They wanted me on the committee and I said, 'Well, who's chairing it?' He and Kevin Foley said, 'Well, you are.' I thought that was wonderful, that's great. I went to the lift with Kevin Foley and I said, 'What made you think of me?' to give my ego a nice boost. He said, 'We couldn't think of anyone who would take the death threats from the fishermen.' I actually got on with the fishermen like a house on fire. They had legitimate grievances.

Can I say that we sorted it out, we satisfied the fishermen. The only thing I did do was some of the fishermen wanted to go fishing without paying for their licences, so I stopped that and made sure that was all sorted out. I did that select committee.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It does. I have other questions in terms of how you found being in a house of review rather than in a house of government. I might get you to touch on that. I will pursue this point for a minute. Regarding that lack of frank, fearless advice that the Public Service is theoretically meant to be providing, how had that been compromised in South Australia? Was that longstanding, back from the 1950s and 1960s, or had the Public Service become more politicised in recent years? How do you account for that difference?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was an evolutionary process that was moving that way. What it is like now I can't comment on. What I think was the case was the growth of the number of public servants, the growth of the Public Service, and there was always a conflict between who was running the place, whether it was the Public Service or the politicians.

There were several occasions when I would have somebody in my office, a public servant, and I would have to say, 'Come with me.' We would go out and I would open the door and it would say, 'John Quirke MP'. I would say, 'Now sit down and I will tell you what's going to happen.'

CLEM MACINTYRE: Let's go back to the parliament. With the experience of sitting in the house of review, rather than being a player in the House of Assembly, in South Australia, did you require different skills and a different approach for that or was it—

JOHN QUIRKE: It did. It was a different set of rules, but it was still pretty much the same. If you had issues on certain things, you could actually see those opposite and quite often you could get together and you could get an outcome that was satisfactory to all concerned, and that was the same here as it was over there.

The only time where that was breaking down a lot was in the last two years of the Bannon and Arnold government because of, obviously, the issues that were coming through. At that stage, I was Chair of Economic and Finance, and some of the stuff that came before me, some of the stuff I saw, was just dreadful.

CLEM MACINTYRE: The other thing I want to touch on about life in Canberra was that obviously there was much more travel. One of the things we touch on in these interviews is how being a politician shaped your family life and so on. Was it significantly different and more challenging heading off to Canberra so often?

JOHN QUIRKE: It was. It was difficult for the family. Occasionally, they would come over with me. They had certain entitlement rights, which were less than what is there now, but that was it. In my last year there I was away for 178 days a year. It was too much for that. The other thing of course is that my health had started to deteriorate a lot. I had a lot of back problems at that stage, which would take a couple of years of surgery to sort out, and so by the end of that period I had had enough of it.

In short, yes, they are houses of review, but it is only if the minister, whoever it is, is prepared to listen. There were some ministers who were much more prepared to listen than others. I had a close relationship with Dale Baker. I was his shadow and he came to me on day one and said, 'Well, you get the job and I get the salary and I can't think of anything better.'

CLEM MACINTYRE: He was Treasurer and you were shadow treasurer?

JOHN QUIRKE: No, he was the minister for mines.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Mines, okay, sorry.

JOHN QUIRKE: We had a number of issues there and he would consult me on everything. On one particular occasion we had a problem with Coober Pedy. The mines up there were always a problem. What the government was proposing to do was to change the Mining Act so that a mining lease could be quadrupled over a period over a piece of ground for opals. The opal miners did not want it. They thought there were companies coming in, which there were not, but that is what they thought. Dale came to me and said, 'I have terrible trouble. The Democrats are voting for it and all the rest of it. What do you think?'

CLEM MACINTYRE: Just again for context, the Democrats had the balance of power—

JOHN QUIRKE: In the upper house.

CLEM MACINTYRE: —in the upper house.

JOHN QUIRKE: What happened was that the proposal Dale was pursuing was one that John Klunder in the Bannon government had actually proposed. I said to him, 'What do you want to do about it?' He said, 'Next Wednesday morning, I will send Mick, my driver, out to get you and we will have a meeting with the head of the mines department and his people.'

So I went in there and I said, 'We are going to do this,' and 'We'll do that.' There were two fellows there from the mines department, very senior, and one became quite agitated and the other one was not very happy. I said, 'You two haven't changed. You've been around to see me three times and I have told you that we're not doing this.' I can actually say this because it was on the public record afterwards. I said, 'Now, you go and get me a cup of white tea, no sugar, thank you, and you bring me a map and I'll show you what we are going to do,' in language that a bloke with a seeing-eye dog would understand.

Now, Andy Andrejewskis, Dale Baker and Jeannie Ferris—who would go on to be a Liberal Senator later and worked for Dale—all burst out laughing and looked at me and I winked at them. I showed them on a map what we would do. I got that sorted out. That illustrated how it all worked. When I retired from the Senate, Jeannie got up and told that story about the seeing-eye dog, which probably in the 21st century I shouldn't say.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That's a good story. So retirement from the Senate in 2000?

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes.

CLEM MACINTYRE: And a post-political life—you were busy with various things.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, I was on a couple of boards, different company boards. I went on to the Operation Flinders board, I was on a mining company board for about 12 years, I did some private lobbying for certain sectional interests, but really for about a year and a half I was much more worried about my back so that I could walk properly. I have always had a lot of trouble with arthritis. It was such that I had to have lots of surgery on my back and one thing or another. But I served on a mining company board and a few other things and I let the party look after itself. I decided that, when I left that, I would walk away—not entirely but for most of that.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You kept up your membership of the Labor Party.

JOHN QUIRKE: I still do.

CLEM MACINTYRE: So, other than health and obviously some problems there, your post political life was reasonably productive and not difficult. I am trying to draw some contrast with members who leave not of their own volition—loss of an election or something—and then find themselves in the wilderness with no sense of where to go and what to do, but you were ready for life after the parliament.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, I had lots of things to do. I kept up all my contacts with people and still have regular lunches with both sides that I served here with. I was friendly with one or two Democrats, not too many—no-one from the Greens party but one or two Democrats and things like that. I took the view that I didn't want to lecture people about what they should do because I didn't appreciate it when people tried to do it to me. I was more in the Reg Bishop-Jim Toohey mould: I have done my bit and now I will move on.

CLEM MACINTYRE: We will just finish with a few reflective questions, I suppose. Let me ask who you think were the really most impressive figures that you served in parliament with, in terms of ability to hold the chamber's attention, speak with clear authority, people who you anticipated when they got up were going to be worth listening to. Who were the key players in your time?

JOHN QUIRKE: On my side John Bannon had been a great debater and he used those skills and all the rest of it. He was clearly one of the best debaters in there, even though we didn't get on. That was it. The other one, of course, is Mike Rann, who was the best image-maker I had ever come across. I think Mike was the sort of fellow who would go on to be a good Premier, and I think he was.

Dean Brown was very good, and is still a close friend of mine. In politics, you have to do all sorts of things. Towards the end, in fact the week before Dean Brown lost the premiership, I was approached by a member of the Liberal Party to come and get some questions to be asked in the house. It was, I suppose, a campaign to shaft Dean.

Anyway, the bottom line to it all was that by then the Chinatown restaurant group that met every Friday was meeting every other Friday because the guys had got older and all the rest of it. We had our own private room there, so I told this fellow that we would meet there. I can mention this fellow's name: it was Dale Baker, because Dale is no longer with us, but the other guy I won't mention his name, because he is. I went down there and I was 10 minutes late. I went in and Steve Georganas was in there, who at that stage was just a branch member and he liked the Friday lunches and those things.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Subsequently the member for—

JOHN QUIRKE: Now he's the member for Adelaide.

CLEM MACINTYRE: —Hindmarsh and then Adelaide.

JOHN QUIRKE: I said, 'Steve, you've got the wrong Friday, mate'. He said, 'I can gather that.' I sat down with them and they gave me a series of questions for question time the next week to ask Dean, and it was almost the identical questions to John Olsen, who they were championing. I said, 'I'll do it. Off you go.' Anyway, I went and saw Rann and told him what I was up to and got his approval. He was right into it. We did it all. I would sit there in front of these people, and poor old Dean knew he was in trouble and he would falter a bit, and I would be saying across the chamber, 'You look like foreman material to me, John!' and all these sorts of horrible things.

The night they did the shift, it was a Tuesday night. One of the Liberal members of parliament who I knew, one of the newer ones, came up to see me to tell me what they had done, and I said to him, 'I think you're a fool. I don't think you'll be winning your own seat for doing this,' but that was it. I went down and saw Dean, who was quite distraught, and I said, 'I'll make it up to you one day. You've got to do some dreadful things in this business.'

Fast forward 11 years: Dean is out of politics. We need somebody on our mining company board. I get him on. I make him chair of the board. We never got a more hardworking fellow, to such an extent that when Dean had his portrait done here in parliament he had five of his ministers from his government there and me and my wife as guests. So that tells you about the cross-flow between the two.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It sure does.

JOHN QUIRKE: Dean, I still see a bit of. I must say that with most of the issues now that come up, if anything important comes up in the Labor Party I tell one of my sons, who is right into it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You have identified a couple of the more impressive people you served with. Are there any particular issues, campaigns or projects you championed that you hold dear?

JOHN QUIRKE: I seconded the gaming machine stuff, even though I am a wowser: I don't drink, I don't gamble, I said I would never put a dollar in one of these machines. But at that time in early 1992 it was obvious to me that there were buses leaving Adelaide every day to go to Wentworth to take pokie addicts and all that stuff, and that seemed to me silly, given that of about the roughly 800 licensed venues in South Australia at that time about 100 of them were in receivership. They had never got over the .08 and then the .05, and the reduction in the amount of drinks and this, that and the other.

Frank Blevins was the person who pushed it up. It was a private members' matter and Frank pushed forward to get gaming machines into the hotels. I seconded it and I was very happy to do it. Some time later, when I had left politics here, I got invited to lunch with a couple of fellows. They rang me up and they said, 'Before you come, Nick Xenophon is coming to lunch.' I said, 'That's all right by me. If he will sit with me, I will sit with him.'

We actually got on like a house on fire. We had different attitudes to this thing. He would ring me on different matters later. He rang me once when a bloke I had put in parliament had given him a bucket of shit to tip all over me under parliamentary privilege. I told him the truth of it, and that was it. I found Nick to be quite an honourable fellow.

CLEM MACINTYRE: You introduced a bill for euthanasia, too.

JOHN QUIRKE: I did.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It was obviously important to you, but it didn't go very far in the parliament. Was that a source of frustration?

JOHN QUIRKE: Ultimately, it became the law, but not that time.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Yes, eventually.

JOHN QUIRKE: Yes, it had. I had seen my father die in dreadful circumstances, as well as others. I thought that we could deal with this much better. At that stage, Marshall Perron, I think is his name, up in the territory had put something in, and it had actually been overridden by federal parliament. I put my bill pretty much with the same terms as Perron's bill into South Australia here. It was controversial—the Catholic Church in particular.

The interesting thing is that the day the bill was being introduced, I was meeting a new endocrinologist. I am diabetic for many years. I met this fellow at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. He said, 'I know you, don't I?' I thought, 'Oh dear, this man is going to be putting needles in me soon,' so I kept my mouth shut. At the end of it, I said, 'Well, I will tell you.' He said, 'No, I have worked out who you are. I am demonstrating against you tonight on the steps of parliament—myself and my wife.' I said, 'That's fine. When you finish, I will come out and collect you and take you in for dinner.' We became lifelong friends. He looked after me until he unfortunately died about four or five years ago. That summed that one up.

The Archbishop at that stage was Len Faulkner, and the Catholic Church preached hellfire and damnation against me. Sister Janet Mead, who did that song *Our Father* and all that, rang up my electorate secretary, who was an Irish Catholic, and tried to put the pressure on. I said, 'No, we are not baulking on this.' I knew then it wouldn't get up, but I thought that at least we have to start this debate, which is what I wanted to do. When Kyam Maher finally got the numbers for it, he actually contacted me and got me to come here to be part of the whole show.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That's a good end to that story. I suspect I know the answer to this question, but it is one I like to ask. You must have enjoyed your time in the parliament. There were some wins and some losses and so on. What would you do differently if you had your time again?

JOHN QUIRKE: Probably, I would have stayed in South Australia, rather than go back to the Senate, because the stress of the travel, the days away, away from the family, from the whole thing. When I had been a staffer there, I had the eldest boy who I had got while I was there, but I didn't have the others. I think, probably, if I had it over, I would have thought twice about whether to go to Canberra. I think it would have been easier to have stayed here.

CLEM MACINTYRE: Alright then, are there any other thoughts or reflections you want to offer as we wind up?

JOHN QUIRKE: No. I just think this is a wonderful process. I want to thank you for your time today. I hope it has been useful.

CLEM MACINTYRE: It has been great.

JOHN QUIRKE: I hope it has been good. Peter Mayer, my former lecturer from the university—one of the great stories with Peter, which I will put on here now, is that when he was lecturing to me, there was a very hot day in March or whatever it was in 1971, and he suggested that the tute groups go down to the River Torrens and sit there. We did. We were on the north bank of the River Torrens by the footbridge, and on the other side was Humphrey B. Bear. It was just new at that time. There was a television crew behind us, with the camera and everything and all the rest of it. There was a mum and three kids on the footbridge, stopping to see Humphrey.

Anyway, Humphrey is dancing along, swinging his walking stick as he goes. The camera didn't work the first time, so he stops and does it again. Then he does it a third time, and something still went wrong. All of a sudden, Humphrey is getting a bit hot under the collar. So the top comes off, the bottom goes down, and whoever it was who was Humphrey was there in his knickers—and did Humphrey know some naughty words. It drifted across the river. Let me tell you, we were all rolling all over the place, except the poor old mum and the three kids were crying: 'Humphrey is not supposed to know the same language that grandpa knows.' That was it.

CLEM MACINTYRE: A very memorable tutorial in politics for a young student.

JOHN QUIRKE: Very memorable. I remember that very strongly from my time with Peter Mayer.

CLEM MACINTYRE: That's a good story to finish with. Thank you very much, John, for the time you have given us and for your reflections on your life in the South Australian parliament.

JOHN QUIRKE: Thank you very much.

The interview concluded at 12.47pm.