On 21 December 1990, I enjoyed my last day in the Senate, going from that institution to the University of New South Wales as a professor. Newspapers made gracious and positive reference to the occasion. The Senate made me honorary president for the day, so that I opened proceedings, and then the whole afternoon was taken with goodbyes from many senators. I made the following comments in what is called in Parliament a ‘valedictory address’.

Many colleagues have been kind enough to be in the chamber for this small event, and to all those senators, thanks. Some other senators have been kind enough to speak, and I apologise to those who would still like to speak but I am conscious of the time and of the nearness of 3.45 pm. To you, Mr President, to the clerks, to the Hansard staff, to the committee secretaries, to the Senate officers, to the waitresses—thank you not just for what you have done this year, but for what you have done over the long period since 1974 for me personally. You have all been very kind.

I want to thank my colleagues, too, for their friendship, for their tolerance, for their collegiality and their kindness. I want to thank you, Mr President, and the Senate for the great honour you did me this morning and say how much it was appreciated. I would like to thank the attendants in this place for an event earlier this week where they made a presentation to me that moved me very much. To all who have contributed—thanks.

Valedictories while the person is alive have something of an anticipatory quality. It is the kind of occasion where only the good is remembered, where people’s attributes are magnified, and where faults are conveniently forgotten. It is an
important occasion for the individual—one that should occur once only and, in my case, Senator Teague, it will be once only. I will probably take the advice of some of my colleagues and not return.

However, it is an opportunity for a look back and a retrospective view of one’s parliamentary career, and what one has done. On that score, let others judge. I do not care to do so. I just mention that when I was whip and we brought down the guillotine, we did not just bring down a guillotine, we brought down a guillotine with a gag attached.

But, in any case, Mr President, I came here with less understanding than I have now. I have taken part in some great events—some of them quite painful to those dear to me; and some have been mentioned today. The thing about it is that one grows in the process of moving through those events, whether it is 1975, 1987, or whatever. I have grown in terms of passion and in terms of clarity of view. I have grown because of the crises and I would not have avoided them.

This question of growth and understanding—perhaps it is the same with all honourable senators. Honourable senators should leave this place with no apologies and they should remember that senators are generally of better quality than people outside generally acknowledge even if they are not always of the quality they give themselves. There is a story about General Douglas Macarthur, to whom an apology was made by a newspaper, I think in San Francisco, in which it said that it had made the great error of underestimating him simply because he overestimated himself. That is a good story.

Perhaps honourable senators might consider that we sometimes lack a sense of historical perspective. We sometimes ignore the lessons of those who built up the Senate over 90 years since Federation. If we do forget these lessons, Mr President, we know that we are doomed to relearn them in a painful way.

Retirement from Parliament is such a matter. There are people who have been here previously who have given some very good advice about retirement. Senator the Right Honourable Reg Withers advised me, not once, but three times, and twice in writing, to get out. He made the point that those who leave voluntarily do so with much less bitterness than those whose retirement is forced on them. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle has probably told Senator Kemp the same thing. She told me that she has not missed the place once since she left. Sir Robert Cotton made a complete break when he left, after a very distinguished career here. And, of course Senator Powell, your predecessor, Senator Michael Macklin, having made his own decision, spent the next three months urging me to follow him—which I am now doing.
Honourable senators often believe that the institution began when they arrived and that it will end when they leave, that its existence is for that brief period when honourable senators are here. Because I am leaving today, I do not have that view. Honourable senators sometimes think they are immortal and invincible. They know in an intellectual sense that they will go sometime, but that is something to be put off. The Senate only exists because they are here.

Well, in medicine we sometimes talk about the process we call denial. It is quite useful sometimes but it can be difficult if taken too far. ‘Golden lads and girls who read Cymbeline might care to remember their inevitable association with chimneysweepers.’ It is the institution, Mr President, that is continuous. It is the Senate that continues; not the senators. It is the Senate that outlasts presidents, clerks, officers and senators.

Since I have arrived here, I have seen some amazing characters leave this place. Senator Justin O’Byrne was a senator for 33 years. We have only had the Senate existing for 90 years. He served for a lot of that time. Then there was Senator Sir Reginald Wright and also Senator Ian Wood, who served 27 years. Senator Douglas McClelland and Senator Peter Rae each of whom had served more than 20 years. Yet when each of them left, they were forgotten one day later: it was as if they had never been here. That is as it should be. The view of the Senate is resolutely towards the future. There is little time for any regrets or any farewell. There is almost no time for a backwards glance.

It does not matter how long honourable senators serve; their role is in helping the institution. It does not matter, Mr Clerk, how long you are here; you are but the present clerk in a line that stretches from the past into the future. It does not matter, Black Rod, how long you are here; you are the link between the black rods past and present. It is the same for all honourable senators. So I look forward, with some pleasure, to knowing who it is that my division will eventually choose to replace me and who will come here next year in my place.

I mentioned the General of the US Army Douglas Macarthur. As an old man, he returned to the US Military Academy at West Point, of which he had been commandant, to receive the highest honour that the academy could confer. And he made an amazing speech—he used no notes at the age of 82. In the peroration of that speech he mentioned that wherever he was his mind would always come back to ‘the corps, and the corps, and the corps’. The best testament to the service of any individual senator in this place will not be what rank he or she achieved—whether that senator was a minister, whether that senator

1 ‘Fear no more the heat of the sun; or the furious winter’s rages, thou thy earthly task hast done, Home art gone and ta’en thy wages; golden lads and girls all must, as chimney sweepers come to dust.’ Cymbeline, Act 4, Scene 2.

2 MacArthur (1964: 422 et seq.).
got into Cabinet, whether that senator did this or that. The best testament
will be through his or her part in sustaining and developing the Senate itself;
in contributing to the vigour of the Senate, in contributing to its procedures,
to its capacities and to its role and to determining whether the senators have
contributed towards the strength of the Parliament.

I remind honourable senators that a former senator, Fred Chaney, was once asked
whether Parliament lacked power. Chaney’s answer was that the Parliament lacks
no power, what it lacks are parliamentarians to use the power it has. Each of us
has a duty to think about our contribution and our role in the Parliament. I say
to officers: I have set these things out so that you can know what my objectives
are and if you wish to question me later we can go into performance indicators
and performance standards. When Arthur William Edgar O’Shaughnessy wrote
a very famous poem with the lines ‘For each age is an age that is dying, and an
age that is coming to birth’, he could have been talking about the Senate, and
its progress, movement and change. I leave now, in line with the advice of Reg
Withers, at a time of my own choosing, to go to a career of my own choosing—
to a third career: to a position of value and worth to teach medical students in
a fine university. Of course, there is sadness and loss, particularly with regards
to the friendships and the company of significant people. But I go to do more
work, to contribute to the education of young doctors, to lead an important
school in a fine university. So, Mr President, I will not be here when you return
in February, but always there will remain in my mind the Senate and the Senate
and the Senate. I wish you all good fortune for your remaining time here and for
the work you undertake on behalf of this institution and this nation.

Responses to the speech

You should be proud of your years of service to the Senate, the Government
and to Australia. Because of your intellect, honesty and integrity, you will leave
a space in the Senate which will be hard to fill in more than the usual sense.

—Murray Hanson, Parliamentary Liaison Officer, 1975–77, 1990

When I spoke to the hundred outstanding year 11 students at the Queen Elizabeth
Silver Jubilee seminar [that week] they were at pains to tell me how much they
had been impressed by Senator Peter Baume who had spoken to them the day
before. They drew the contrast between the impact Senator Peter Baume had on
them and what they thought politicians were actually like.

—Senator Janet Powell, Leader of the Australian Democrats

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4 Senate Hansard, 21 December 1990.
Today the spotlight is on the human face of Parliament. On the motion of Senator Bourne, a NSW Democrat, today is Professor Senator Doctor Peter Baume Day … following a move by the President, Senator Sibraa, Senator Peter Baume will be Honorary President this morning.

Parliament is a microcosm of our society … the members and senators reflect our strengths and our weaknesses. They come and go, often unnoticed by the community at large. However, every so often someone special comes along.

Peter Baume is such a person. He is admired and respected by the whole Parliament … in fact, dare I say it … He is much loved. He goes on to become Professor of Community Medicine at the University of NSW.

—Bruce Webster, ABC commentator\(^5\)

\(^5\) Quoted by Senator Bob Collins, Senate Hansard, 21 December 1990: 6,359.