Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (17:56): I would like to start by thanking the gallery for turning out in such numbers for my valedictory speech. It is something that I did not expect. I am very touched. I would have to say that, in some 23 years here, it is the largest crowd of interest that I have had from the gallery—other than the time I put on a set of sunglasses on at about 6 in the morning. But I digress.

I was not going to do an eulogy, but I am going to do an eulogy. The reason I say it is an eulogy is: I mean, really, what is a valedictory? A valedictory is an eulogy that you get to do yourself. You get to check and see who is paying attention. You get to watch and see what the reactions are. You get to get back at people who do not give you the respect that you think you deserved on the occasion. You also get to go to the wake. So, in those circumstances, this is a valedictory, but to me it is more of an eulogy. And what better day to effectively end a career. Donald Trump is now a serious political figure in America. Surely, it is time for me to forget that I could ever be a serious political figure here.

It has been a privilege to serve, as all have said before me. But I also have to say that it has been a surprise in some way. When I got here, I probably was not supposed to. And, once I got here, I am sure as hell I was not expected to stay. Back in 1993, I had the honour of winning the seat of Corinella, which was held by the now member for McMillan, Russell Broadbent. I have to say, though, that I did not beat Russell; John Hewson did. And that is the truth. I also have to say that, of all the people that I have served with, or of those opposite in this House, Russell is one of the ones I have come to know, to respect and to hold in incredibly high regard. He also holds the honour, I think, of the best intro. In my time as minister, when I went around the country to various functions, I was introduced by many people—many members of my own caucus, members of the opposition. I think he gave me the best intro of anybody. And I think, also, he genuinely believed it.

What happened after Corinella, of course, was that I got abolished. It was quite confronting because of the fact that I had actually been largely responsible for the Victorian branches' actual redistribution submission. So, if it could ever be said that I did not have much to say about what happened, I think I proved it on that day—and I think others would argue I have proved it on many occasions since. I was then in a situation where I was—to use a term which relates to Trump and the current situation—pretty much the presumptive member for Holt, at least for about 24 hours. Then things went on from there and, as people know, in the end I conceded Holt to Gareth Evans, the then Senate leader. And let me put on record, because I know he does not think I really believe it, I think Gareth was a great Labor icon who made a tremendous contribution to this caucus and to government over many years. I also still think he should have retired then.

Then I went on to Bruce in the '96 election. In the '96 election, as members will recall, things did not look that good for us from a long way out, and I was sitting on a margin of about 1.2 per cent, so I was not planning anything other than 'I'm outta here' once that election was called. Somehow I won—and I still do not know how. But I remember, after the event, getting a range of phone calls from people and catching up with people. One that I remember is Senator Robert Ray, who said to me, 'Fantastic!'—and people who know Robert, and many of you do, know he was very much into football analogies—'Mate, you're a champ. Two for two. You've beaten Broadbent of Corinella. We moved you to Bruce; you've beaten Beale. Two for two. We've got to get you your hat-trick.' I will not use the exact words that I used in that situation, but you will get a sense of what I said. I paraphrase—and I paraphrase politely—'Gee willikers! Robert, if it's up to you and bloody Kim Carr, the chances are I'll be running in Mallee. And I'll bloody well win it.'

Moving on from that, if I talk about the question of my longevity or the fact that it was many times under threat, we come up to 2006 and a situation where the Victorian branch was descending into anarchy. It has never happened before! There was much blood and there was an attempt to knock me and a range of other people off at preselection, and it was successful on a number of occasions for other people. But, anyway, I won that preselection on 50.007 per cent.
An opposition member: Never in doubt!

Mr Griffin: It was never in doubt. It all came down to one vote. Howard Smith, I will always love you. He has already retired; it is okay, I can get away with that one. I might add that Howard Smith did it. I have lost count of the number of people who have claimed it. But I thank all of them with the sincerity with which they operated at the time. But the thing I would say about this—it says something about what it is like being in a marginal seat, and those of you who are in marginal seats know what it is like—is that being in a marginal seat is like being a gunslinger: it does not matter how fast you are, it does not matter how good; eventually your gun jams, someone comes along who is faster or who shoots you in the back. I guess the point there is that most people do not get the chance to decide when they go and, frankly, I am astonished that I have been here long enough to be able to do that—23 years. As I have said to many of you, if I had killed someone I would be out by now.

Mr Broadbent: You did!

Mr Griffin: Member for McMillan, I tried, but we are both hard men to kill. I am going to jump around a bit because, as I said, I was not going to make a valedictory and I got talked into it. I was also threatened by a number of colleagues. You are just so lucky: 90-second statements today were going to be a rolling version of ‘what I would say if I were Alan Griffin’, and I decided that I really was not ready for that. So I will jump around a bit. I want to make a couple of comments about policy issues and some of the policy that I was involved in and make a couple of comments about the time that I have had on the front bench. I was there for a long time and in a range of different areas. I particularly want to thank Jenny Macklin in terms of the assistance she gave me when I became shadow parl sec for health back in ’98. I was going to tell the story about how that happened, but I probably won’t at this stage—that is probably one for a beer on another occasion! But the great thing about it is: Jenny actually was prepared to give me a very sizeable component of the health portfolio and allow me to do it myself. Occasionally, she would be checking with me about what I was doing but, at the end of the day, she pretty much gave me free rein. And I appreciated that. To be honest with you, a lot of shadow ministers and a lot of ministers do not do that with parliamentary secretaries. But she gave me that chance, and I think I rewarded her with not only my loyalty but also my hard work over that time.

I will focus on one policy issue in terms of that, and that was the debate and the work around the setting up of the gene technology regulation system at that time. The debate on the Gene Technology Bill 2000—and on other related matters, as they always are—was, at that stage, I think, one of the 10 longest debates in the Senate. It was a very complex area. It had those on the extreme left, in terms of the Greens party, basically calling for everything under the sun; those on the extreme right—as in the Hanson party—pretty much asking for the same things; and a need in the middle to try to come up with some sensible policy for the future, and we worked very hard on that. In the end, we were able—at nearly 6 o’clock in the morning, on the day that Nathan Albanese was born, as I recall—to get that bill through. I will quote, from the Hansard, Michael Wooldridge, who was health minister at that stage:

I should put on the record my thanks to the member for Bruce—occasionally in this place you can work together to create a good outcome.

This was met with uproar—from my colleagues. The only one who made the Hansard was Bob McMullan, who said: ‘You’ve just wrecked his career.’ I am not going to tell you what Leo McLeay was yelling out! It was very interesting to have that reaction from my colleagues. I do not think it quite wrecked my career. But I have got to say: for a while there, I walked carefully and quickly with my eyes all around!

The other policy area that I will talk about is the one—and I am surprised it ended up being this way—that I am very much identified with, which is the veterans’ affairs and defence policy area. I will just tell a couple of quick stories, if I can, about that. I have to be honest: I never wanted veterans’ affairs. I see the member for Dunkley over there—another former minister, a sparring partner and a man I respect—and I think he will know what I mean when I say that, as, I am sure, will Deputy Speaker Scott, as a former minister, as would others who have served in this area. I got the call from Kim Beazley after he had come back as leader to come down and see him, when he was doing a reshuffle in mid-2005. I went in to see him—and I had just been to the gym, so I was standing there looking very seductive in a nice pair of shorts! And he said to me: ‘You’ve been in sport and recreation and, frankly, you’re not working hard enough; I’m going to give you a real job.’ And I said, ‘Oh. Right.’ And he goes: ‘Yeah—veterans’ affairs.’ And I will not use the exact words that I used, but I said, ‘Oh golly! Veterans’ affairs. Ohhh.’ And he looked at me crestfallen and said, ‘You look disappointed.’ And I said, ‘Well,
mate, I mean, they're really hard.' And he said, 'Yeah, but, you know, it's really interesting.' I said: 'Yeah, but they're really, really hard. These people fought for their country. They have no problem fighting with a minister or a shadow minister or anyone else. A lot of them have had problems, and they're still dealing with them. A lot of them stay up late at night on the computer and can be a little bit offensive. And, frankly, it's an area where there's so much passion and often not a lot of clarity.' And he said to me: 'Well, you're wrong!' Then he said, 'Well, actually, you're right, but I'll tell you where you're wrong.' He said: 'You will learn more about your country and its people in this portfolio than in any other portfolio you can have.' And I thought to myself, 'Yeah, right.' We said we would talk about it again, but we never did. And I walked out grumbling. But I then got down to it. And about six months later, I was with Kim in his electorate and we were doing some presentations, and we were in the car, and I said to him, 'Um, I've got to apologise. You were right.' And Kim said, 'Of course I was right. What was I right about this time?' And I said: 'You said to me that in veterans' affairs I would learn more about my country, our country, than I could learn anywhere else.' And I said: 'And you were right: they are hard work, but it's worth it. It's worth every bit.' I have to thank him for that, even though I think that in the process I probably ended up being little bit typecast.

In terms of working with that community, it has encapsulated to me a really important part about service for the country, about the really great things about our young people, because so many of them are young and the need for us to do what we can to ensure that, once they come back, we do everything we can. You never, ever get this stuff all right; you never will. And there are a lot of misinformed stories that go around about what actually happens. I have to say that, although there are, rightfully, reasons for complaint at times, the bottom line is: this country treats its veterans better—from what I can tell and from what I have seen—than any other country in the world. You never end it there. You always have to work to the future and there is always more that can be done, but, frankly, that is the case.

I met some great people in that area. I still meet them. I still catch up with some of them. I will always respect them. But, gee, they suck it out of you; they make it real hard. But, nonetheless, I am very proud of the friendships that I made over that time. I am very proud of the work that I did in that area. I am touched by the fact that, even now, I still get people coming up to me at functions and elsewhere and basically telling me, 'We really appreciate what you did.' I might add that they say the same thing about the member for Dunkley, and they say the same things about some of the other former ministers that are here today, such as the member for Lingiari.

I want to get serious for a minute, beyond that seriousness, and talk a little bit about some of the things that I hope people will remember. Because, after 23 years, I have worked it all out now. I have got all the answers. So now I just have to explain why the hell I did not do it while I was here—and that is hard. This is something that I said at a meeting that we had last night about the diversity of the parliament and the fact that we need to ensure that we maintain that and a worry I have about whether we will.

I have always said that I think that there are two types of parliamentarians. There are parliamentarians and there are politicians. You can be both, and some have done that. I will use as an example the member for Berowra and also Kim Beazley. A politician, in my view, is someone who comes here to seek to actually wield power. And when I say 'wield power', I do not mean it like it is evil; I mean to actually be part of an executive government and to make changes or to implement the things that they think need to happen for the country. That is their predominant focus. And then, as a separate group—but, as I say, they overlap—are parliamentarians; that is, people who come here and become an important part of the institution in terms of celebrating difference, diversity, issues, being in a situation of getting up and saying the things that you cannot necessarily say when you are part of a government or part of an opposition. They are both really important roles. They are both essential roles. They are both roles that we need to celebrate and maintain into the future.

There is a danger, I believe, in the way parliament has gone over the years that I have been here of a situation where the focus is solely on the issues of the politician. I have been as much at fault in that as anybody, because I have been a factional headkicker; I have basically done what I could at various times to do what had to be done, in my view, to keep things together and to hold it in one piece. I have to say that on some of that stuff now, with hindsight, that I think I have been wrong. I think we need to be able to celebrate that diversity more. We need to be in a situation where we are more able to confront other issues and have those debates. We need to work to achieve those sorts of outcomes. Dissent and discussion—they overlap and, frankly, neither is bad.

I will turn to the media in the context of that because it is actually very relevant. It goes to the question of the nature of how this place is reported and the nature of what that means. I will start off, given there are so many up
there in the gallery, by saying that in my experience the journalists in this place are overwhelmingly good, decent people who are trying to do their jobs. That is the nice bit, guys. Having said that, I think that job is made more difficult by a range of things. The adversarial nature of this place does lead us to a situation where we will all tend to put things in black and white and in a manner which actually avoids the grey. That is understandable and it is often the way reporting needs to be done, because of that need to simplify things, but it is not always healthy.

When I first got here, I used to hate the news service. When I say the news service, I mean I used to hate watching the news on WIN TV or the ABC, because you got the Canberra bulletin. You got a half-hour bulletin; 20 minutes were about Canberra and 10 minutes were about Sydney—or thereabouts. On the 20 minutes about Canberra: I think that the ACT government, most of the time, has done a really good job, but I do not really care that the Chief Minister of the ACT has opened another toilet block! I just do not think that that is national news, but that is what we used to get at that time. There was no point watching it, because frankly it was all very Canberra-centric. Now I miss those days. I really miss them, because now we have a couple of 24-hour news channels that are running, predominantly, the same bulletin over and over and over again.

When I was a minister and something went wrong, I would turn the TV off. Normally, I would watch Sky or ABC24 just in case something happened. But when it happens to you, the last thing you want is to have that going over and over again. It is one step off suicide watch. There is a repetitive nature to it. We have lots of programs where it is journalists interviewing backbenchers, interviewing ministers, interviewing shadow ministers, interviewing journalists, interviewing former politicians, interviewing someone who once met a former politician, or interviewing the tea lady. You go through it, and it is all there. The problem with that is that it tends to be very repetitive and it tends to be very much rote learned, and it is a big part of how we now present ourselves. I think that there are some real worries there for the body politic in terms of how we train to actually play roles in the executive government.

I know when I started out in the old days, if you put a press release out, you had to have something to say. It did not get printed, but you had to have something to say, you had to have an argument and you had to present it. Now we circulate transcripts from programs where we are speaking from the lines of the day, and I do not think that is healthy.

Also, we have that whole situation around social media. Everything is so much more immediate. Everything is so much more reactive. It is like we are living in one great big reality TV show. I understand we have to do it, but the fact of the matter is that I do not think it really helps with the debate that we need to have here on so many issues. The other point I would make about the gallery is that, if we went back 20 years, the gallery would have been absolutely chockers, because there were a lot more people employed. There were a lot more people employed to analyse—a lot more people employed to drill down, understand and report the news. I think the situation that many of the bureaus are in now is incredibly difficult. It impacts on them in terms of how they can do their jobs, and it impacts on us in terms of how we are reported.

Another issue is the Public Service. I think we have a great Public Service in this country, but I have to say I worry about exactly how much more we can cut it. I worry about the question: when do we get to the stage where it is efficient and when do we get to the stage that it is deficient? I am genuinely of the view that that stage is coming. There are cultural issues there as well that need to be looked at. I, for one, am not in favour at all of waste, but I have to say we have to be careful about that.

An issue which the member for Berowra raised was around the question of parliamentary committees. I think parliamentary committees are absolutely essential, but I worry about whether we are in fact ensuring they are resourced properly. We have had an explosion in the number of committees in recent times. Although I can see why some of those committees needed to be formed, and they should have been, I do think maybe we have too many committees now. I certainly do not know that we have enough secretariat staff to ensure that they are able to resource them properly. That is going to impact on the quality of reports. There are also impacts on the number of committees people are on and, therefore, how they can engage. It might look good on a CV to have three or four committees, but I do not see how anyone can actually play the roles they need to play in those committees in that way.

The Parliamentary Library is absolutely essential, as other speakers have said. It is an incredibly important part of the support that is provided to members on both sides of the House. Again, the cutbacks there are now starting
to have a real impact, and that is going to have an impact on the quality of what we say and what we do, which will have an impact on the quality of the democracy we are part of.

Enough serious stuff for now! Some fun times. I note the member for Grayndler is present, and I had to say something about that, I am putting this on the record because there are attempts being made in other parliaments, in other places, to endeavour to undermine a great tradition, a great icon. Let me be very clear: the fun faction started in 1996. I have to concede it was his name; the member for Grayndler chose the name. There were two co-convenors, and it is for life—and it is me and it is him. Anyone else is a pale imitation and it just will not work. We spent a lot of time in 'red square' as we called it. It was mentioned earlier by the member for Chisholm. I have to address the question that the member for Chisholm half raised in her speech! I want to make very clear that the fact that the member for Grayndler and I endeavoured to engage her in activities around red square as a convivial opportunity to share time with one's comrades is one thing. The fact that she got pregnant soon afterwards is completely unrelated to either of us totally! But we did have some fun times.

I will give you one story from around that time. Back in those days, we used to have a lot more late night sittings. I remember one night there was an immigration bill that was on. It was probably about 11.30 or 12 o'clock at night. It had got to the stage where the member for Berowra was doing something terrible—I forget exactly what—and a number of us were in line to explain to him, in vivid detail, why in fact he was wrong. I had the misfortune of following on from the member for Grayndler. I came in for his last five minutes, and he was haranguing the member for Berowra, the minister. He basically went on along the lines of, 'I will say this to the minister for immigration and ethnic affairs: I will be at functions in Sydney next week on at least four nights out of five, and on those four nights out of five I will be watching him and waiting to see that he does what he said he will do tonight. And I want to make sure he understands that.' He then sat down. And I stood up and I said, 'It's not often that I feel sorry for the minister for immigration and ethnic affairs, but if he's got to spend four nights next week with the member for Grayndler, he has nothing but my sympathy, nothing at all.' He, of course, took offence at this and spoke to me about it later.

But the funniest thing was a week later. I was in my office and he bounds in with a letter. 'See, I have fans,' he said. 'Here is a letter.' A branch member had been listening to the debate at midnight and his letter basically said: 'Good onya, Albo. You were fantastic. You took it right up to the government. They are a bunch of you-know-whats'—dah, dah, dah. 'What a pity you were followed by that right-wing bastard, the member for Bruce, who treated you with such disrespect. He should be deselected'—as some have tried!

Another aside which relates to around that time is when I first became parl sec to Jenny in health. Those who knew me at that stage would know that I was a chain smoker—two packs a day. I actually made some of my best friends in this place in terms of both the member for McMillan and the then member for Kooyong, and also Senator Ronaldson, who was then the member for Ballarat. We spent a lot of time outside airports, outside doors, outside anything, fagging away and, frankly, often solved the world's problems much better than we did when we were in here. The day I became the shadow parl sec for health, I arrived back in Melbourne and I was in my office. I was sitting there and all of a sudden one of my staffers came in. Luckily for me, it was a staffer who just cannot hold a poker face, one of my oldest and dearest friends, Pat Gibson. Pat came in, but she was shaking as she handed me a piece of paper. I was thinking, 'Sugar, what's this?' It was a press release from the AMA which basically said, 'Shadow parl sec for health, quit or resign,' and a diatribe about the fact that you cannot possibly have a parl sec in the health area who basically is a chain smoker, and, 'It's an outrage,' and all that. I was reading this, and I was going, 'Oh my God, oh my God,' and then Pat just could not hold it. She just said, 'No, it's a joke! It's a joke!' The current Premier of Victoria and the current Minister for Finance in Victoria very much enjoyed that. I will never forgive them.

In this game, luck is a fortune. I have been sometimes lucky and sometimes unlucky, and some of the times I was unlucky it actually turned out I was lucky. That goes to the question that timing is everything in this business. I am not going to name all the ones that I know, but I am going to name a handful, Arch Bevis, Daryl Melham and Kelvin Thomson, and there are a number of others here as well, who never got the chance to actually have ministerial rank, and in those circumstances it was because of timing. And there are many more like that.

Other than that, just very quickly: leadership contests have effectively had an enormous impact on both sides of the House over the years. It has meant to me and to others that we have lost friends, or those friends have taken a long time to be able to forgive, and it has been a cathartic experience all round. I regret many of the things that happened, although I believe the circumstances were that I did what I had to do. But I fully understand
why others would disagree with that, and I respect their views. I am sorry that it all played out that way on so many occasions. But I would say to everyone: we need to learn the lessons of what happened, and we need to understand those lessons. One of the reasons why I have spoken about this at times is for that reason, and I think it is important that we do. Instability is not good for the political system as a whole. The way we have been going, I am reminded of the words of Clarence Darrow when he said: ‘When I was a boy, I was told that anybody could become President. I’m beginning to believe it.’

Thanks—and I have to be quick, I am told, so I will be very quick—to my family. My three daughters, Hannah, Bridget and Sophie, grew up while I was here. They are now adults. I am very proud of them. It is a great credit to the work that their mother did to look after them, and it is probably no small fact that I was away for a large part of it. That probably did not hurt!

In the Labor Party, branch members one and all are an enormous support. Whether it be the Wonthaggi branch in the early days or right the way through to the branches around Dandenong and Glen Waverley, they have done me proud, and I hope that they are proud of me. People like—and I will only name a couple—Dale Wilson, who was a state member of parliament and very cruelly treated, as an example, and people like Lee Tarlamis and so on have been there for me right the way through. I want to mention unions and in particular the old Federated Clerks Union, the ASU and all those involved at that outfit. In this situation I particularly want to mention a handful of other colleagues I have not mentioned already, people like Lindsay Tanner, from Victoria; from the Victorian government, Dick Wynne and Gavin Jennings; and I have to say, from the other place, Senator Carr—although there have been times when he has driven me mad.

Parliament House staff one and all—whether it be security, attendants, cleaners, COMCAR, clerks, the sergeants-at-arms, office staff, library, Hansard—you have been fantastic, and you have basically made this place work. I have a temper, and I reckon I have spoken rudely to about five of you in that time. That is amazing. You should all be very proud of the work you do.

As I said, there have been some great public servants that I have worked with. I want to particularly mention Ian Campbell, Mark Sullivan, Ed Killesteyn and Bill Rolfe. Bill recently passed away. They are examples of a great tradition. It is a tremendous credit to them, and it is a great service to me.

We have not got time to do all of my staff, for a whole bunch of reasons, but I want to particularly mention Pat Gibson, who was with me right the way through until very recently retiring; Ray DeWitt, who is still with me now; and Matt Broderick. They have been my Praetorian Guard. They have protected me every chance they could—and sometimes I have needed protecting, no question.

About all my other staff I will make a couple of points. Some of them have gone on to greater things. I mentioned by title Daniel Andrews, who is the Premier of Victoria; Jill Hennessy is the state minister for health; and Gabrielle Williams is the member for Dandenong. None of them have ever done anything I have told them after they have gone, but at least I can drop their names.

Beyond that, Mr Speaker, I would like to note that at the end of this speech I will seek to table a full list of my staff. In order to assist Hansard I have an electronic version. I am just not quite sure that the nature of the parliamentary computer system is such that it will be able to take it without a separate hard drive.

My electorate is a diverse community. It is a community that has struggled in parts but is a community that has always come through. Dandenong has changed a lot over the years. It has, in my view, a good future but it is a work in progress. Glen Waverley is very impressive; I just wished they voted better.

I will end with this: I have found the last 23 years to be at times a great struggle, at times a great privilege and at times too much to bear, but here I am today. As I have said to a few of you, I feel a bit like one of the characters in The Shawshank Redemption: I am about to be de-institutionalised after 23 years. The question will be: can I cross the road? Am I going to be able to do basic tasks? Some have said, will I in fact—

An opposition member: Will you sit in the gallery?

Mr GRIFFIN: No, I will not sit in the gallery! And if I do, people are happily allowed to have me shot—well, maybe I’ll go once.
If you look at *The Shawshank Redemption* and the characters, the question is whether I am going to go and work in a supermarket and hang myself or whether after metaphorically crawling through acres and acres of excrement I will end up in a situation where I smite my enemies. My children, I am glad, think I will do the latter. I was very proud of that until I thought to myself, 'I hope they mean that's because: "Dad, you fight and you always try and win."' I was a bit worried that they thought I had covered myself in excrement too often.

I am conscious of the time, that it is time to go. I am conscious of the fact that it has been a great honour. I thank you all. It has been—fun?

Debate adjourned.