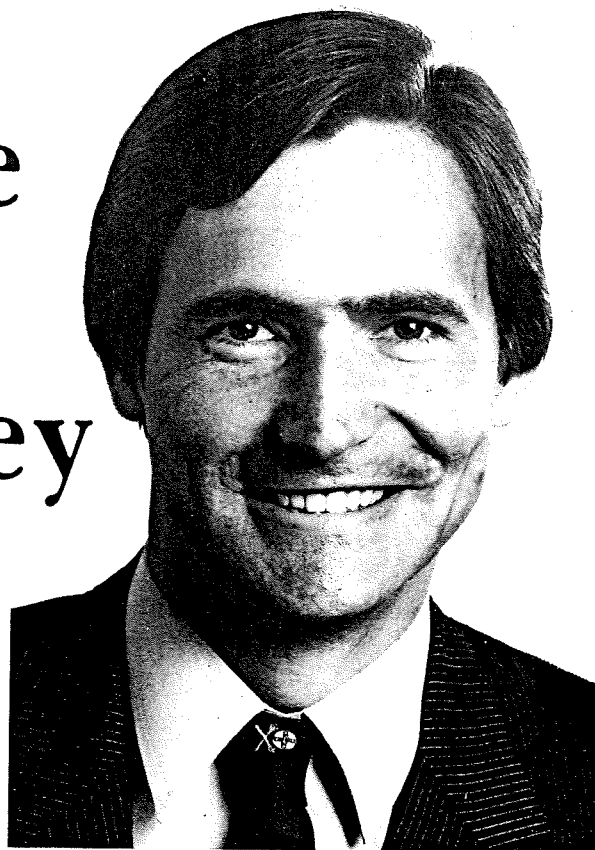


Face to face with Jim Longley



"Christians should be the salt of society," says Jim Longley MP, State Liberal member for Pittwater since 1986 and parishioner of St John's Mona Vale. Jim is chairman of the government's treasury advisory and environment committees.

Jim has attended St John's, since the age of five. He is active in the parish and often serves as a lay preacher. While a prominent Christian in his electorate, Jim doubts whether the 'Christian vote' helped him in his election to office. In the 1986 Pittwater by-election a Call to Australia candidate ran against him.

By the time the last state government election came along he was better known in his electorate. "A lot of people have said the reason I have done as well as I have is because I have lived in the electorate all my life," says Jim.

While kept busy by the business of politics Jim is still involved with local Christian organisations. His speaking schedule includes Christian business groups and he also lends support to the Peninsula Youth Forum. In parliamentary circles Jim is a regular at the Thursday prayer breakfast. Run by John Johnson, speaker of the upper house, this breakfast is usually attended by 20 to 25 people who come from both houses and all parties. Christians of the various parties also meet together in groups of a more informal nature. "It's important that small groups of Christians get together, regardless of what their occupation is." Jim also organises a luncheon where invited guests can hear a low key presentation of the gospel.

In his role as a parliamentarian Jim has been greatly influenced by some of the Old Testament characters. "David is probably one of the best examples of the interaction of being a servant of God and a servant of the people... I get a lot of inspiration from him," says Jim.

"People have a very perverse idea of party discipline," Jim says. Party members are free to exercise a conscience vote on issues which involve "strictly moral decisions"; for example, abortion and the death penalty. On those few other occasions when, after open debate and voting in the party room, one differs from the majority of the party, one has to put up with it. "You may not agree on the strategy but you are part of a team and occasionally have to wear something which you don't think is the best."

Politics is often perceived as a 'dirty business' but Jim believes it is no more so than any other occupation. The only difference is that in politics the dirt tends to find its

way into the newspapers. Jim works on the rule that everything he does will eventually become public knowledge. "It may be tomorrow, ten years down the track or 30 years". Most people do not have to think in those terms.

Christians in politics have to be thoughtful in their contact with the media. The media is seeking to generate ratings or sales. "To achieve these they want to generate conflict ... This makes you much more careful in what you say ... Christian leaders need to be a little bit more aware of what the final result could be or ... that they are going to be quoted out of context in order to generate the maximum level of conflict. There is really much more needed today than the high profile approach which will lead inevitably to counter-productive conflict," says Jim.

He notes that society is changing rapidly, while not necessarily portraying any uniform trend. Indeed, he sees a very important role for the church to play in relation to parliament. "It is important that they give what they believe to be the Christian position on specific legislation... policy recommendations flowing from solid scriptural argument ... too often in politics we see analyses which are little more than trumped-up ideology. Recommendations should be well researched and be the product of a consultative process. Through discussions with people from different parties political difficulties can be identified," he says.

Jim offers the following advice to churches on issues of legislation: "Be proactive! There is a much greater need to be proactive than ever before. Our society is now changing so rapidly that if you are only reactive... you will be about five years behind the times." If a proactive and consultative approach was adopted, says Jim, "the church could have a pretty dynamic effect."

Peter Bentley

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