

The Wheeler Centre

It's a great honor to be invited to give this speech. As a fellow Victorian, and part of the Maurice Blackburn alumni, I feel an extra buzz of closeness to John Button, although we were of different eras.

John Button was an honorable and good Labor man – much loved, in particular for his straight talking. I'm going to adopt that straight talking style tonight because we have some lessons to learn from the last six years. It might seem indulgent to go back over old ground, but if we don't talk frankly and constructively there are worse risks. So I'm going to adopt John Button's "tell it as it is" style, although this will inevitably be painful for some people.

I say this only because Australia will need a stronger Labor Government next time, to repair the damage that will be inflicted by Tony Abbott and to pursue the next generation of positive reforms for the nation.

You will be the first and last audience to have my version of events, and my perspective on what the Party can learn from our 6 years in Government. I have no intention of writing a book, or providing further commentary on these issues after tonight.

We don't want to airbrush our history, or we'll lose the good parts along with the bad. The good policies implemented by the Rudd and Gillard Governments should not be hidden, we should be proud of that legacy, even if we owe an explanation to Labor people about what went wrong.

The Party needs to own its proud history of compassion and nation building: whether its the historical snow mountain scheme and Medicare, or the contemporary NBN and disability care.

Tonight I want to do something a little different than talk about Labor's policy purpose and direction. I want to provide some practical tips for the next Labor Government, and for Labor MPs, on how to best conduct themselves. And how to ensure that a fresh Labor purpose is constantly in focus, and ways that mission can be delivered. I hope it might be of use to Bill as the new leader, and to others, as they go about their work of regaining ground for Labor.

Superficially it may seem boring to talk about housekeeping and conduct, when a Party of progressives wants to be about ideas and improving lives. But I use examples to highlight their necessity if we want to deliver fabulous policies effectively.

We can want power, but we have to want it for a purpose. So we have to know how to use that power well, and to full affect.

So, here are my 10 housekeeping tips for members of a future Labor Government (from someone who has recently swapped the cabinet table for the kitchen table – and thus now has the freedom to offer such opinions!).

1. Labor must always focus on the fact that good policy improves people's lives and that is why the Party exists

If this is always at the front of our minds and the top priority in decision-making, we will be less easily diverted by polls, personalities and punch-ups.

This must be a constant focus. In government, a Labor party needs to choose a few big areas and focus on them, taking people with them.

A Government needs to take time to explain the problem, work on a range of solutions, build coalitions to campaign for them, understand the opposing arguments so as to improve your own and measure their validity. It must allow enough time and sufficiently foreshadow the change so local MPs, branch members and citizens can be part of the campaign for change. And take time to get all the technical detail right.

The best example of this done well was Disability Care. When Bill Shorten first started advocating for it, it was not government policy and money had not been allocated. Slowly and surely the reasons for acting

became overwhelmingly clear – the productivity commission’s work, the growing community campaigns, Jenny Macklin’s endless detailed and careful work on design, structure and coverage. Julia’s steady determination to find money to make it happen. There was rightly no room in this for personality or internal politics or leaking.

This vital social policy change was handled so well, that the Liberals had no choice but to adopt it as their policy too. This was a sign of success, policy wise, but it was also obviously designed to neuter the political impact of such a substantial reform.

I think we erred by letting this claimed “bipartisanship” stop us campaigning on it during the election as a top class achievement, painting the perfect picture of Labor’s purpose. I was surprised we seemed reticent to talk about it in the campaign - Jenny Macklin should’ve been allowed to travel and get on to the front page of every regional paper in the country.

Other good examples of strategic, consistent work was our approach to getting rid of Workchoices and the Better Schools investments, the apology to the Stolen Generation and our aged care reforms. Examples in my portfolio areas that I think worked best on this front were the regional cancer centres and plain packaging of cigarettes.

The mining tax was probably the worst example – not necessarily for its content - but for its lack of preparing the ground, understanding better the arguments against us and identifying how we would deliver. Not to mention announcing it in a confusing period where we crammed this new mining tax policy in with finishing up health reform and dropping the CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme).

So a related issue here is - don’t do too many things at once.

The truth is a government can’t cope with it and the public can’t absorb it. At best, no one will know you’ve done it and you won’t get any credit. At worst, people will be confused or stressed by too much movement and activity, and end up opposing something that with more time might have been palatable. And in a rush or confusion, the policy might not be the best one either.

2. Governments as a whole, and the Prime Minister in particular, need to keep their focus high level – spending time and energy on the things that really matter.

If you can’t describe what you are doing in general terms, and its purpose, then either the policy isn’t right, or you’ve descended into detail most people don’t need and probably don’t want to know.

The art as a Minister should be to be across the detail and be sufficiently trusted by colleagues to manage and explain the policy detail when needed, but to allow the PM to focus only on the big picture. The Cabinet should be used to sign off only on purpose, direction and broad structure, but not excessive detail.

In our first term of Government we struggled with this. There were some contentious issues and policy problems that ran for months, in some cases years, without there seeming to be a way to bring contentious issues to a head. There was no avenue for Ministers to bring genuinely difficult issues, where there were legitimately tricky calls to be made, to Cabinet for a real discussion. Health and climate change were the two longest running “non-discussions” for the first term of Government, with some other contentious policies getting only cursory cabinet approval at the last minute. There was a reticence by the Prime Minister for big strategic calls to be made by Cabinet, or sufficiently in advance to prepare properly.

In contrast, carbon pricing, disability care, immigration and aged care reforms all had detailed Cabinet coverage.

Kevin as PM simply refused to list contentious, and often strategic, items for Cabinet, and effectively stopped that conversation. In retrospect, many of us, me included, should have insisted on bringing on these discussions anyway, demanding strategic decisions be made by Cabinet early enough to be useful.

Kevin also had an overwhelming inclination to focus on minutiae, as a way of avoiding the big, harder decisions. This took up a lot of valuable Prime Ministerial head space which is better spent on the big picture.

I'm sure the inevitable outcome from the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference could have been prepared for differently, and the Government might have responded differently, if Kevin had allowed Penny to bring a proper discussion to the full Cabinet. And we know how much turned on this political issue and its handling.

In addition to the lack of Cabinet engagement on some big strategic calls, Cabinet was also misused by being asked to deal in enormous detail with material it could never hope to be fully across. This meant that many Ministers managed to be both frustrated about lack of attention to some key issues, as well as being exhausted by huge amounts of energy required on less significant matters.

In John Button's era, the public knew of some of the big battles Cabinet was grappling with. They did not pretend issues were always easy, but thrashed them through and then – all importantly - respected the outcome and stuck to it. Only then did the PM announce Government policy.

This had the benefit of protecting the PM from having a public position too early. Which leads directly to me third tip -

3. Good leaders are good delegators

If they don't delegate, they and their governments ultimately drown in less important matters.

Having seen it up close, I have a huge amount of sympathy for just how much work a PM has to do. The sheer weight of government and the crushing level of personal demands are far more intense and all encompassing than most people can imagine. Kevin and Julia fully devoted themselves day and night to this task. For all their issues, no-one could fault either of them for heroic work ethics and sheer determination to do everything humanly possible in the job.

But the Prime Minister is still only one person.

We can't let the system slide, if it hasn't already, to expect this person to have superhuman powers. Our increasingly presidential-style campaigning doesn't help this. I hope any new Labor leader will not continue this pretence – it will ultimately be a great benefit to the Party and protection for them.

This desire to fix the world's problems became crushingly exhausting for Kevin and debilitating for the government. Julia also took on too much – as the new leader, the promised "fixes" were all attached to her, she wore every mistake and every set back.

My overriding point here is, that future Labor Governments need to allow Ministers to act, give them real responsibility with consequences if they fail to deliver.

Over six years some big political problems could've been stemmed earlier if this approach had been taken. This respects the role of Ministers, but at the same time demands Ministers to step up to the real work, instead of spending time on other distractions.

This also frees up some precious Prime Ministerial time and it protects the PM too - the Government's most visible and senior spokesperson is shielded from some inevitable failures and mistakes.

4. Labor needs to welcome debate, not fear it.

A progressive party needs to be able to argue over issues and not see it through the prism of internal politics.

Both internally and externally Labor, in the time I've been involved, has become more afraid of real debate. For a progressive party that prides itself on a constantly renewing its social purpose, this is not good news.

Of course, a shallow and manipulative media can make debate or dissent difficult, sometimes nigh on impossible, but we need to push past that and learn to welcome a contest of ideas.

For this to be truly possible we need to relearn that debate has to be about an idea or an issue, not about people and personalities. We have to learn that disagreeing on an issue doesn't mean you don't or won't support a leader or a group. The National leadership ballot has been good for us on this front, although I confess this pleasantly surprised me.

Because of our leadership tensions since 2010, and the relentless stalking of Julia by Kevin's supporters, every substantive policy issue or decision since has been viewed through this unhelpful personality/ leadership prism, and it has massively stifled debate. On top of this, it gave leakers, and those prepared to play kamikaze politics, the chance to use issues day in day out to keep the leadership issue burning.

On a slight tangent, I also strongly believe the party needs to look at options (caucus rules or otherwise) to give local members more autonomy to raise and campaign on issues for their community, or I fear we are leaving this local identity and space open for independents and the minor parties.

We also need to encourage and embrace more debate in the party and the parliament – and find ways to better use the broader brain power around on tough issues. Disappointingly, even senior and experienced MPs were shunning a chance to be in debates on complex issues – like the resistance and begrudging response I received when I commissioned the respected joint intelligence committee of the Parliament to assess a list of new powers and proposed changes to our intelligence laws that agencies like the federal police, ASIO and ASIS had requested. In my 15 years in parliament I've never seen such an unenthusiastic response from a committee being given a serious, real job to do – including, I am sad to say, senior Labor figures.

I have a similar hobby-horse about ballots within the party, whether for pre-selections, ministerial positions or for leadership. I fear that we have become risk averse – trying to avoid having ballots to save embarrassment, rather than recognizing it is good to have a go, that you win some and you lose some.

Sometimes running in a ballot, even if you lose, can be best for the Party. It can be cathartic. A ballot also bestows credibility on the winner, something our newly minted federal leader will gain substantially from.

And what are we telling young people otherwise – they should only try and do something if they are sure they will win first time up?

5. Be polite and be persuasive. Or I could call this “Keep yourself nice”. (I know I'll be accused of being “nanny Nicola” here, but it is an age-old rule that needs to be re-imposed)

If you don't do this, you lose ground for no political purpose. You waste time apologizing and you lose arguments for no good reason.

And this is not a tip, just for the sake of nice manners. It fundamentally affects political outcomes too.

When Kevin was flashed across the TVs icily ignoring Kristina Kenneally in health reform negotiations, it cost us an awful lot to recover from and actually gave NSW the upper hand for the first time. Disparagingly calling her 'Bambi' behind closed doors was pretty silly when she was whip-smart and went on to run rings around us at the final COAG negotiating table. As a result, Kevin conceded more to NSW in hospital beds at the expense of money set aside for mental health. As was predictable, mental health became a thorn in our side later on, and in the 2010 campaign was the major health issue that weakened our otherwise great story.

The Garden Island announcement during the 2013 campaign underscored that this lesson had not been learned and we lost a day or two of the campaign needlessly.

It is hard to imagine the disability reforms ever getting through if Julia had taken this approach, rather than the patient consulting, discussing, and convincing that were hallmarks of her style – but for which she got little credit.

I must say that Kevin always treated me appropriately and respectfully. Although I was frustrated beyond belief by his disorganization and lack of strategy, I was never personally a victim of his vicious tongue or temper. I did, however, see how terribly he treated some brilliant staff and public servants. Good people were burnt through like wildfire. Loosing senior people like Chiefs of Staff and deputies or contemptuously ignoring their advice left the Government weaker.

On the “keep yourself nice” front, some of the worst behavior was very overt - brazenly sending up your own materials on TV or ostentatiously packing up your office as cameras just “happen” to be in obscure halls of the parliament to capture the moment. If Labor MPs follow a few basic tips on decent behaviour, and pull others into line when they don't, then we need never see such shameful behavior again.

6. Always ask what you can do for the Party (and the nation) not what it can do for you. (with apologies to JFK)

If you don't ask this question first, you've lost your focus and purpose and the public will mark you down fast.

There were plenty examples of people putting their individual interests ahead of the team's, particularly in Ministerial ballots and appointments. Reports of able MPs declining particular portfolios, perhaps because it didn't suit their long term personal plans, is a sign of this going off the rails. The only correct answer if a PM calls and offers you a particular Ministry is surely "Yes, Prime Minister".

Of course it is natural to have ambitions, and to be disappointed if they are thwarted, but the focus must always be on the team.

Almost everyone in politics has some terrible setbacks and disappointments and they are all told time and again to "suck it up" (think of Bill Hayden, Simon Crean – just to name past leaders who went on to Ministerial service with great dignity).

There are some disappointed people across the country this week who have missed out on a front bench position they desired. They, like others before them, will rightly be advised that they will be measured by how they cope and recover from defeat or a set back. To take stock, find other ways to add value and prove why the Party should promote them.

And this is good advice – it just needs to be applied consistently.

This was never demanded of Kevin after he lost the Prime Ministership and it should have been. He and his supporters did not adhere to the standards they had demanded of others.

I'll deal in more detail with the leadership change in 2010, (so hold judgment on that for a moment), but I cannot discuss the need to put collective interests first and fail to mention my opinion of Kevin's determined bad behavior after his humiliating removal. Even if you accept the method of his removal was unfair – nothing excuses persistently destabilizing and leaking against your own team during an election, or as a senior minister or as a backbencher.

If you are part of a Labor team, and care about its mission, you put that before your own hurt or ambition.

No-one can any longer be in any doubt how trenchantly and continuously this occurred at both Kevin's hand and his supporters - caucus knows it and the media knows it. Although his removal was dramatic and brutal, it was his refusal to recover with dignity, to rise above the treatment he was meted out (as has for eternity been required of others) and failure to claim his place as a constructive elder statesmen that, in my view, showed his true nature.

You may think this demand is an unrealistic ask, but its not really. Just compare it to the exemplary behavior of John Brumby, who surely must've been as bitterly disappointed and humiliated as Kevin was when he was removed as leader on the eve of an election, after years of hard work in opposition.

7. Good governments run best with good diaries – so boring, but universally true.

This is not just about housekeeping, as it seems, but you actually can get better policy, get more done and protect against foreseeable problems if you plan a diary and run to plan. You can only get to an end game if you have planned where you want to go.

The machinery of Government is enormous. And it can be put to enormous good. But it is a slow moving beast – no matter how bold or impatient a government may be. If plans and projects are set, parameters identified and clear instructions given, with regular and consistent oversight – the work produced can be excellent. Thousands of people can work more effectively around you if direction is set early, timetables stuck to, and materials are read.

But if political direction chops and changes, if the questions being asked constantly move, if deadlines come and go without meaning – it is very inefficient, and ultimately dispiriting. Its politically confused too.

Kevin had a terrible habit of attending meetings not having read detailed papers that he had commissioned at the last meeting – often very complex ones, at very short notice. For example, I remember a meeting only days before Christmas 2009 where a total rewrite of a health policy was demanded. Despite many, many hours of work into the night, I do not believe that paper was ever to do this day read by the Prime Minister, let alone read over a Christmas holiday he had already ruined for others.

Let me emphasize that, everyone, me included, loved having a Prime Minister so interested and passionate about their portfolio, so were prepared to put up with a lot. Everyone certainly understood the level of demands on the PM's time, and would have willingly provided a brief overview to start the meetings where we left off, but this was never permitted.

Doctors and nurses also adored having the PM at their hospital and swelled with pride at the interest he showed. I suspect this is why none of them complained about late notice, constantly changing days to visit and being chronically late. Once over 20 hotel rooms had to be paid for as the hospital we were scheduled to visit the following day was changed en route in the PM's plane. We went instead to a city hundreds of kilometers away and the hotel was cancelled too late for a refund.

Several times we were called to last minute meetings on Sundays at the Lodge – to work through a roadblock. Wayne, Julia, myself and senior staff would be told on the Friday or Saturday to be at the meeting in Canberra the next day. On one occasion staff spent that whole day on the lawn playing handball, not allowed in, but not allowed to go home to rest, or be with partners and family. More than one relationship was destroyed by this relentless disorganization.

The real tragedy, though, was that despite over 100 visits to hospitals and health services (with Kevin, me and three junior ministers), we had not been able to pin down Kevin to use this focus and phenomenal interest to move the debate, to test out our ideas, or even to resolve some key areas of contention (like the takeover of hospitals question, that Kevin favoured and I did not).

The visits over six months bought us time, and significant goodwill, but it wasn't time used to also prepare the ground for the final reforms to be put to the states or to capitalize on this amount of energy and enthusiasm. For example, the last minute addition of the GST component of the health deal was only revealed to Premiers in curt phone calls on the morning of Kevin's press club speech – and we all know how that ended up.

In my personal view, this very mundane “household hint” is one key to why the community did not always understand or absorb how much the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments were actually able to achieve. A lot was being done, but it chopped and changed from health reform, the response to the GFC, carbon pricing, mining tax and more.

Although my examples are inevitably health ones, they mirrored what occurred on other fronts too.

Good housekeeping, planning and diary management is necessary to develop good policy, to shape Labor's purpose and to deliver to the community. Governments need to plan. Great progressive reforms simply can't be delivered on a whim.

8. Chose good people - as leaders, as MPs and as staff.

In every walk of life, successful organizations need a pool of talented people, and politics is no different.

This seems pretty basic. And on this front, I have to say I am very optimistic about our future. We get this right, more often than we get it wrong. Having a strong choice of two capable politicians in the recent leadership ballot is just one measure of this. And I reckon Bill and Tanya are as close to “the dream team” as you can get.

I'd like you to look also, though, at the incredibly capable and interesting new members coming into the Parliament, even at a tough election for us:

- Tim Watts in Gellibrand – a tech-head business person with experience in communications and climate change, a Masters from London School of Economics and a community activist against racism,
- Claire O’Neill in Hotham – a Fulbright Scholarship winner, Victoria’s youngest ever woman mayor and a person who has spent a year living with the indigenous community in Gove before her election
- Nova Peris – Labor’s first aboriginal woman senator and Olympic gold medallist
- Jim Chalmers – a very senior staffer, political strategist and thinker.

We ought notice those community leaders and local campaigners like school principal Joanne Ryan, or Newcastle hometown girl Sharon Claydon and bright spark Lisa Chesters in Bendigo – whose connections with their communities and good local campaigning should not be undervalued.

And this time of rebuilding is a chance for others who have not been utilised enough to date to come to the fore – I see Catherine King (with regional and health policy background), Andrew Leigh (with economic brain power and relentless analytical skills) and Shayne Newman (a Queensland family lawyer with great commonsense that comes from real life experience) just to name a few who are stepping up at this time.

And for every good staffer you employ, you double the effective work you can do – so they are worth their weight in gold. They need to be chosen carefully and nurtured. Time needs to be taken to help staff develop and ensure your senior team is properly overseeing and nurturing the others. In busy political life, time must be taken to get the right people and a good mix in your office of those with technical skills, political skills and maturity.

9. Accept you are not always right, and cannot always fix everything – it’s easier with this as your starting point.

If the public is promised a messiah, they’re inevitably going to be disappointed.

Political messages do need to be clear. They don’t have cut through if they are not. In the beginning, Kevin was brilliant at this. Its why he was so successful at the 2007 election – he talked straight and people understood and liked him.

The curse, of course, is that the problems you are trying to solve and policies needed to do so are often complex. So we came unstuck when the solutions were necessarily more subtle or convoluted than the cut through message initially delivered.

“The buck stops with me”, “the biggest moral challenge of our time” are examples that made sense and garnered interest and support, but they come with big risks, as the realities of Government can make this cut through language a dead weight or burden. Its always more convincing to say you’ll “fix” something, when “improve” is a more accurate statement.

In 2007, Kevin was great at cut through, then struggled at follow through.

In contrast, Julia was brilliantly thorough at delivering, but couldn’t always deliver the message.

Kevin had a fatal attraction to everyone else’s problems. He never saw a problem that he didn’t believe he should try and fix.

I recall at least two shocking examples in my portfolio of the interfering and demanding approach taken to the Fukushima Nuclear plant disaster (Kevin was Foreign Minister by then) and the Victorian Bushfires. Neither of these were situations where the Commonwealth could have much of a direct role and these excessive meetings in the middle of crises took up valuable time of the front line officials who were really needed on the ground.

Fuel watch and grocery watch were perhaps two other examples of overreach.

10. And lastly, Never forget polling is only a snapshot, not a predictor.

Otherwise we resign ourselves to a static life – and a progressive party will never win without new ideas, and new ideas take time to be absorbed.

Over-analysed, published opinion polls are having a corrosive effect on Australian politics. Their meaning and value have been given enormous weight, way, way above their real value. This is perhaps exacerbated by the advent of online media as these polls, paid for by old print media, is often one of the few exclusives they have – so they are inflated by the same media who commission them.

But apart from that, we have allowed the polls, and the way journalists interpret them, to have too much influence. Polls can tell us what the current state of play is, but not what might happen.

What a poll can never tell us, is what the results may be after a six month concerted effort to turn an argument around. They are unable to show what might change with persistence.

Its hard to imagine, in the Button era, that the Hawke Government would ever have introduced Capital Gains Tax or Fringe Benefits Tax if the polling was slavishly followed, yet they won the 1987 election.

I truly and strongly believe we've got to be more prepared to see things through, to sell them, to explain, to meet criticisms. Polls can't tell you that someone disagrees with you, but begrudgingly admires your determination. So a static reading of the polls only tells you so much.

Some of the post election analysis has been similarly blunt, and dominated by the number of seats allegedly "saved" by Kevin at the election. It stems from the same type of thinking that allows fortnightly polls to dominate decision-making. I don't agree with the analysis that Kevin's poll popularity saved us more seats than Julia's more consistent and planned campaigning would have, but as there is never a control test I won't waste limited time arguing the toss tonight - my point is broader than that.

We know bums on seats in Parliament do matter – but they aren't all that matters. If the damage to our sense of purpose, to our reputation for delivering good policy and for caring for the community is severe – this reputational loss, and lack of purpose, can take longer to recover from than it takes to win back seats here and there.

And it is harder to win the seats back if you people don't think you stand for anything. The polls can't help you on this.

I believe we must also confront the bitter truth that as long as Kevin remains in Parliament, irrespective of how he behaves, pollsters will run comparisons with him and any other leader.

In my opinion, and it is only my opinion, for the good of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and the movement as a whole, Kevin Rudd should leave the Parliament. Otherwise the action of any Labor leader will always be tested through the prism of popularity compared to him. As well as being constantly unsettling, we should've learned this is not a recipe for success either.

Finale ...

So – perhaps there is one remaining question you may have about my perspective on this time in Government. And it is a biggie.

After all these tips for good and bad behavior for the future ... do I believe we behaved properly in removing Kevin as PM in 2010?

While I think the Labor caucus made the right decision, we handled it very poorly.

I think we had all the right reasons to act, but I think we were clumsy and short sighted in the way we did it. We didn't explain the dysfunctional decision-making and lack of strategy I've focused on a lot tonight. We didn't talk about his rudeness, or contempt for staff and disrespect for public servants (a measure of this was public servants saving up briefs to send to the PM's office as soon as Kevin went overseas because they got quicker and more thoughtful responses from Julia as acting-PM).

Removing Kevin was an act of political bastardry, for sure. But this act of political bastardry was made possible only because Kevin had been such a bastard himself to so many people.

Even though the reasons were there to justify our action, I don't think we handled it properly at the time, and Labor has paid a very high price for this mishandling ever since.

If Kevin had been an employee, he would have won his unfair dismissal case. Not because there wasn't cause to dismiss him, but because we didn't explain the reasons properly to him, let alone to the voting public.

As an industrial lawyer I used to see a lot of these cases – where there was good cause to dismiss someone but the employer hadn't given notice of the problem, or used a different excuse because it was too embarrassing to simply tell a colleague they weren't up to the job, or that everyone found them unbearable.

So after the most brutal and speedy sacking, we got over with politeness and thought it would save Kevin pain to say as little as possible and move on quickly. What the rest of the world calls a polite white lie, became political poison. It was something that Julia unfairly wore as a heavy chain around her neck for her entire Prime Ministership, although we all truly bore responsibility for it.

In the absence of a more accurate explanation, Julia was painted as a treacherous Deputy, although it was spectacularly unfair and way off the mark. In fact, in the twelve months prior, I watched her work through each and every roadblock Ministers brought to her. She took each Minister's complex problem or frustration to Kevin and helped resolve pressing matters as a diligent and trusted Deputy. I never saw any evidence to the contrary.

So although at the time it seemed unimaginable to contemplate being so publically rude to your own PM, with the benefit of hindsight, some of us should've spoken out – if not before, at least immediately after.

Instead, we made a brutal decision and then shied from the brutal explanation that was needed.

We left everyone looking for other answers and by doing this we did a great disservice to both Kevin and Julia. On its own it would've cast a long shadow over the next three years in Government, and with active fanning by Kevin and his supporters, it proved impossible to recover from.

Conclusion

So I hope my take on events might be worth something to the next generation. I hope they will have learned from this period, and will not repeat its mistakes.

The new Labor team will need to lift itself above the personality politics, stop seeing things as "Kevin legacies" or "Julia legacies", and just see them proudly as "Labor legacies". This will better honour our forbears like John Button.

Surely he, like we, would be proud of how we've left the country a better place after our 6 years of government - with better resourced schools and more information on quality and development for parents, with extra funding to hospitals, thousands more doctors, new cancer centres, plain packaging of tobacco, a fairer industrial relations system and paid parental leave, a strong economy enabling

Disability care. This is not to mention the bravery and wisdom to put a price on carbon pollution, the vision and foresight to plan the National Broadband Network and the compassion to set up the Royal Commission into child abuse. All this, and so much more.

And now the invitation is to the next generation to think how they will refresh the Labor purpose – to pump some new blood into its beating heart. And to be ready to conduct themselves with dignity, so they get time to bed down the vital reforms of the next generation, reforms that we know only Labor will deliver.

We should never, ever as a Party be ashamed of our past.

We should celebrate it, learn from it, and use it to improve our nation's future.

Good luck – and thank you.