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**REMOTE HEALTH FORUM, CANBERRA
1 NOVEMBER 2005.
SENATOR BARNABY JOYCE**

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SEN JOYCE: I was born in Tamworth hospital, my wife was born in Tamworth hospital, my four children were born in Tamworth hospital and so we commit ourselves regional health. Growing up in regional Australia, growing up in Dangelmar. I always remember the trip to the doctor if something was wrong. It was always a case of you got on the party line, you rang up Mrs Bannigan and she ran the exchange, you said you wanted to go to the hospital and she'd organise an ambulance to start driving out to meet you. So you were driving down the hill and they'd have someone driving out to meet you in the other direction. And it was very much a community approach to health. I can remember this with my brothers being born is you dashed down the hill with Mum, you'd be dropped off at one of the neighbours to stay the night whether they realised it or not and you'd walk in in your pyjamas and Mum and Dad would head off down the hill for the birth of Timothy.

Later on I moved out west. I spent some time in Charleville in Western Queensland and of course we started to get out into, you'd have to say the remote areas of Australia there. I've got good stories and bad stories. I remember my wife, Jane, had a baby, and going to the doctor and the doctor said – where are you going to have your baby? And we said – oh well, I think we'll have it at Charleville. And this was her statement, she said – not if you want a live one. So if that didn't put the fear of God into us then nothing could. Now I don't know whether that was a warranted or justified statement but it certainly made you completely aware of where else are you going to go? Where else are you going to go? How could you continue to live at Charleville? If something goes wrong and you need an obstetrician, a paediatrician then what's your alternative? And of course that would be the case for everybody in that district and for everybody in that whole area. It was the base hospital for western Queensland. And it made you very aware of how reliant your are, what safety mechanism good health is, what a safety mechanism. To have in the back of your mind that if something goes wrong there's a hospital up the road with the capacity and capability to look after you.



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On the good side of course we had a thing called the Royal Flying Doctor Service which my wife has been on, and it's a marvellous comfort for rural people in the more remote areas of Australia. The fact that you can call in a mobile intensive care unit and they can move you down to Brisbane, and it's utilised all the time. In our area you always know when it's flying in. I live at St George and I know when it's flying in, until just lately, because they had to do a couple of laps of the airport to hunt the kangaroos off it before they landed. Now they've got it fenced off it makes it a little bit safer. Out there we have some great doctors with it. Cameron Bardsley is the Director of the hospital. I don't know what his real title is, but at St George. He's an incredible man, a person who is completely dedicated to his work – a complete professional, a complete professional with the staff at the hospital, and he's a person who's completely astute in his prognosis and I think you could put him into any hospital anywhere in Australia and he would rise to the top. The last time they made him in charge of the district for south west Queensland and he said he'd do the job as long as he could stay in St George, which for us in St George was great, it showed his true connection with the earth.

Now politics in remote Australia I'll get to that in a second but I just think we should cover a few areas of what the issues are with health at the moment. One of the main things that we see at the moment, obviously everyone's aware of the Bundaberg health crisis. I think if you haven't heard about the Bundaberg health crisis then you've obviously been reading an extremely good book over a long period of time. The Bundaberg health crisis ... there's a range of reasons, and without going looking for people to persecute I think it comes back to this. It's the ownership of the hospital by the district – where that process of the ownership of the hospital by the district has gone.

The Bundaberg health crisis is the greatest recommendation for the reintroduction of hospital Boards that you'll ever see. I strongly believe that if we had hospital Boards we wouldn't have the Bundaberg health crisis. You would have had a closer connection between the community and the problems that were obviously starting to arise at that centre. You would have had a reporting mechanism – a further reporting mechanism for the nurses within that hospital. They would have been able to go to a mediating body, a person in their local town and pull them aside and say – well Mary or John, I want to have a quiet word to you about what's going on at our hospital, at OUR hospital, at OUR institution. The ownership would go back to the community. And no doubt that would



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have got the method in train to try and circumvent that problem before it became as big as it did. Those people had no reporting mechanism but to the state body – but to basically an ultimate body. And you’ve got all the problems of just the fear factor of having to go to government to fix the problems in your hospital. So I think that there’s a move now to try and move back to a responsible ... either at a more direct and regional level. So the advocacy of hospital Boards is a move in that direction. But it also gives a greater ownership – a greater pride within the community, of that hospital. There are so many hospitals that I go to now and they say – we have difficulty with those hydrotherapy pools and issues like that – raising money, because there is not the connection between the community and the actual hospital Board, because the hospital Board doesn’t exist.

We have a lot of overseas doctors that are coming into Australia at the moment and some of them are good – some of them are very good. And the good ones should generally have stayed where they were in the countries where they’re needed. Unfortunately we also have some bad ones. Or not so much bad but certainly not up to the standards that would be expected of them in Australia, and I can quote examples but I won’t of the doctors that they currently have in places such as the Congo or Nigeria who really need extremely close supervision to fulfil their duty. Not because they don’t implicitly have the capabilities to do the job but they have not had the regimen of training that is required to give a sense of competence to that medium and a sense of confidence to that hospital, and it becomes self evident in the stories that come out.

So that is an issue that we need to address. We need to address the area of, that if basically we’re taking doctors from another country then what are we leaving behind for that country? If you take a doctor from South Africa and a doctor from Namibia goes to South Africa then people in the town in Namibia are left without a doctor. And that’s what happens. If you take a doctor out of the Congo well what you’ve taken is the medical services for 10,000 people and you leave them with nothing. And that nation has obviously made some investment in that medical practitioner so the moral question you have to ask yourself right at the front end is do you have a moral right to divest those people of whatever basic services they have? We have to think globally about this and we have to be responsible as a nation to fix our own problems up within our own nation and not start borrowing from other peoples, especially from those areas of the world that are the most needy of those services.



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Medical training for regional Australia works really in its best way. If you want people out in regional areas then you must train them in regional areas. That has been proven that if you want people to remain in regional areas then you must train them in regional areas. James Cook University Council is having great success now, now that the medical school is completed, in getting medical students out to regional areas. Newcastle University has been a great advocate of that. ANU down here in Canberra would have to be seen as a large inland campus. We have a lot of clinical schools, and it's good to see that now in Rockhampton you cannot get a job. There are now jobs for doctors. They're all taken and there are people on the waiting list because people from the clinical schools in Rockhampton have made that quantum leap in their life. They've made that quantum leap in their life where they actually enjoy living there because they trained there. They have a social group, they have friends, they have sporting clubs. They go to Yeppoon, they go to the beach or maybe they go out west. But you've got to get people trained in that area. You've got to break the mould. So we must get a lobbying group to lobby for the greater medical schools and medical training in regional areas. It would be great to the University of New England perform that mantle and it would be great to see a move made towards that direction.

Obviously I'm surrounded at home by nurses and I rang up this morning, I made a terrible mistake. I rang up and asked for some advice and boy, did I get it this morning. But there's a strong belief that obviously they're top heavy in admin, that the directors of nursing are too removed from the actual bedside work and that people want to see a greater ratio of nurses to admin. In some areas now we see as many admin as we do people who actually go to people's bedsides and one would have to ask the question ... that has evolved. It wasn't always the case so what has happened to cause that and how can we address that issue?

Administrators should report to clinicians, not clinicians reporting to administrators is the general call that you hear everywhere. And the funding, the funding has to be more flexible with more flexible delivery.

Before I start looking at the politics, a final point that I think we should all be aware of and it is important, that without scaring the horses we do have the potential of H5N1 epidemic outbreak and we are in a position where the mixing of the avian flu with either through mammalian,



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through pigs or through people is in proximity to us and the sparks are occurring now all over the world but we haven't had the outbreak, it hasn't made that transition itself. And I put it in my maiden speech. It's not something ... it wasn't something that I'm reacting to because of the latest media, I've been following the people at Griffith with their work on the development of a vaccine because I sort of grew up with Strain 19 and brucellosis so seeing the work that they're trying to do at Griffith is great. But I am extremely aware of the affects this will have socially on Australia if it happens.

It will have a social affect that we've never seen in this country. And I have made touched on it in making requests such as the remote voting. People laugh at it. Remote voting – why would you want to do that? Of course you'd want to if there was an outbreak of H5N1, there won't be people marching their way down to Canberra and then moving out to every corner of the nation – pulsating in and out of Canberra and moving to every corner of the nation so that we can spread the virus everywhere. There will be immediate quarantine, there'll be restriction on travel, there will be removal of civil liberties because you will have to. Otherwise you will put too many people at risk. At some stage there will be a form of outbreak of it. At some stage – 10 years, 15 years we will get a pandemic. It's just the nature of the world. It's what happens. It's just at this time we will be having it in a world where transport is immediate – where people are within 12 hours of any corner of the world, where the capacity for people to mix in large groups is everywhere, where hundreds of thousands – say millions of people put themselves onto transport networks every morning or put themselves onto planes. There are mechanisms at airports to start detecting people through infrared that have a temperature . This is something that, even in regional Australia, we have to deal with. It might be a case obviously that there will be, if you want decentralisation with a H5N1 outbreak I'm sure there would be people who'd want to decentralise out of major metropolitan centres in a big hurry and they'd be all out visiting their relatives in the country. Anyway, that's something that it would be interesting to hear your views on, and whilst I'm here today I'd like to get some feedback on what you see are the issues.

Politics of remote Australia. The biggest thing about the politics of remote Australia we must recognise is that there are very few of us in remote Australia so we must be very organised. If we are not organised and we are not vibrant in what we do we have no affect. The biggest



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issue I always have out in country areas when I'm speaking to people is saying to them – I don't care if you join the National Party, the Liberal Party, the Labor Party or the Communist Party. I don't care. That is not the issue. You must have a public involvement. If you do not have a public involvement, by way of numbers you will become irrelevant so quickly because that is the survival mechanism – your capacity to have a greater community involvement in what you do. It is absolutely essential to represent your people and that's what all of us do. We represent our people, the people of regional Australia, that you are more vociferous, that you are more passionate and that you are more directional – that you come up with outcomes. Politics is not ... if you go up top ... I always call it "up top". That's what we called it at university because the university was up on top of the hill and everybody was down below, so we'd all say – we're going up top, which means we're going to work. There is no great vestibule of knowledge up there. There is no babbling brook of philosophies. It is just a building with people in it, and they are influenced and affected by things that come in from the outside. And the more they get outside the better it is for them. It is your job. It is your job both as a citizen of Australia and as a person representing the constituency to be ardent in the advocacy of your issues. You just have to keep banging the door. You have to keep banging the door over and over and over again and you have to make people aware of their responsibility.

In politics it's amazing. If I went around the room here everybody is from every State. Is that correct? So each one of you is aware that you have 12 senators – 12 senators in your state. 12 senators who are there to represent you who get paid. They get paid a good wage, about \$110,000 a year but they're there to represent you. You've got 12. Can anybody in this room name the 12 from their State? This is an issue. You have a right for them to listen to you. They have a job. Their job is to serve you. Their job is to serve you. Their job is to be on board with your issues. And if you get a case where you think – well I've never heard of this person before, then maybe your job is the job they need to have. Maybe that's the best person to replace him. look, you look like you're having a very quiet time and you don't have much to do. I'm going to give you a job. This is the job ... and make sure you sponsor them. Bring them on. And never ever for a moment believe that they have a quest for research after you leave their door. After you leave their door their vision of you ... what you've told them in that space of time basically stops, because the next person will move in or another issue will



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move in. So you must be organised, you must be ardent, you must give them ownership of that issue. You must get out to them and say – you now own this issue. I am going to make you responsible for this issue. I am going to give you a job because that's why you're in Canberra. And it's a case of driving that. So the first thing is you must become proactive in lobbying your members.

You must drive the sentiment. Unfortunately when you're lacking in numbers you must drive the sentiment in the public. There is always a warm feeling of people in regional Australia because it is the Australian psyche. They do have an aspiration to the life that's represented by regional Australia. Why do I say that? Because Home and Away is about a little country that has everything. Blue Heelers. The whole of Australia apparently lives in little country towns even though less than 2 per cent of our nation does. But if you watch television you think we all do, and why that is is there is a public belief in that type of view. So you have a form of momentum behind it before you even start.

I think the Isolated Children's Association is one of the best lobbying groups that you will ever find. They are bullet proof, and if you get on the wrong side of them God help you because they have a network and they collect the public ear. They say – you talk about the outback, we live there. And they're very articulate and they're very passionate and they're very directional in what they want and they achieve their results. They get what they want. They get the education systems, they get the resources, they get in the front door. The worst thing you could possibly do is leave the Isolated Children's Association out in the corridor unless you have in mind that you want a new job at the next election. And that is the sort of organisation you need. But they're so few in numbers. But when you go to them as a group they are just so passionate and so connected to what their goal is. Their goal is the education of children in regional areas and they are connected to that goal. And that's what you have to be in this. When you're talking to the media you're actually talking to politicians. You have to have clear, concise and punchy messages. You've got to keep your message simple at the start.

I was listening to John Singleton talk the other day and he was talking about the problems that our colleagues on the other side of the House have, and he hit the nail right on the head. Keep the message simple – keep it directional, keep it straight. You can elaborate later on but at the start keep the message simple.



I've given you an example. H5N1. This is a pandemic, it's going to cause a problem, it will cause complete social disintegration. There's the message. And I can see around the room people thinking – oh, that doesn't sound good at all. That doesn't sound good at all. I'll go and have a think about that. I didn't go onto a whole tirade about virology and bacteriology and the current laws that are in process and in train. That's for later on. That's for later on. My job is to get your attention and to bring that to your attention as a fish, so that you come out and grab onto the bait and then you can go further with it and develop a policy structure behind it.

My job is to try and make sure that you get your message through. If you just go up to Tony Abbott's office and that is the mechanism of talking about health, then you'd be selling yourself way, way, way short because you'd just become one of an absolute train of people who'd be marching through his office that day. You must get advocates within the system – advocates that actually know your case and know your details thoroughly. For myself I'm as an accountant, taxation I know it, ethanol I know it. If you want to talk about some family issues and probably quite a number of health issues I know it. But I don't know everything and I don't take on so much that would leave me vulnerable to only half knowing subjects. So get an advocate and pursue them. And the reason I talk about senators is because no matter where you are in your state your senator is there to represent you. They're not there to represent Sydney and they're not there just to represent Perth. They're there to represent the people of New South Wales or they're there to represent the people of Queensland, or they're there to represent the people of South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory, Victoria and the ACT.

And as we've just discovered, a lot of them you are unaware of them. You're unaware of quite what they're up to. So their job is to represent you no matter where you are. So get them out of the cupboard and put them to work. Politics in remote Australia is obviously you must in a way remain politically active but not partisan. You must remain aware of the policy and aware of the structure without drawing close allegiances to one side or the other because obviously then you'd turn yourself into politicians as well and you start to diminish your cause.

But it's fair to give a fair analysis of platforms – of what people are doing, and to make a recommendation on a policy platform as to why you



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believe this to be true and correct and just for your people and why you believe this policy not to be. I think that there are so many issues, especially with health, that go across the political divide. So you will generally find that the people will be only too willing to listen to your message. If you can always not just come up with a problem in politics but come up with a solution. It's absolutely fundamentally important that you don't just present your politician with a problem because why would he make a solution? What is going to inspire him to make a solution? Direct him to the solution himself because when that remedy comes into place it's going to be left with you. It's going to be left on your doorstep to work with it. If you present him with a problem and don't come up with a solution the bureaucrat will come up a solution and that's what we'll be left with. And you might have preferred to be left with the problem than the solution they gave you. So make sure that you have a holistic approach to deal with your issue. That you define the problem [indistinct] and also start moving down the direction of the solution. And then follow it through. Have a core plan. Get to know your politician's staffers. Get to know them well. I've brought Liz along today from my office and they're like gold because they're the eyes and the ears in the organisation of the politician. They know his movements, they can all actually even start organising his diary. If you're on the right side of the staffers then all sorts of tricks can happen. They might just check you into a diary position that someone else was going to have because you turned up, which is a lot better than just ringing up. So get to know the staff members and get to know them on a first name basis. It's just the art of trying to keep yourself to the top level of issues of the day and that's where you want to be with your issues as a group and you want to be at the top level of the issues of the day and so you're going to use every trick for that and one of the best tricks is to know the key people who you want to speak to. Don't bother speaking to Tony Abbott. Tony Abbott it might be the staff of the senator you know, but the staff of the senator you know will get you to meet the Senator, it will get you to meet Tony Abbott and then there's a rate of momentum in that issue. It's already started to pick up. Rather than you just walk in for a 10 minute conversation with the Minister and then walking out and then the next issue or next Cabinet meeting follows it up and you've been forgotten. So get ownership of your issue and from a wider group of people than just thinking if I go to the top, that's the solution, because it's generally not.



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And also make sure that there is a follow up and a continued connection between when that politician is back in your electorate and your electorate is probably your State. Generally unfortunately you're not well represented at a lower house level. Maranoa covers half of Queensland. It's not that Bruce Scott doesn't do a marvellous job but it's such an immense area. It's an immense area so it's hard. Kalgoorlie is a huge electorate. Kennedy, they're monstrous electorates so you'd obviously get disenfranchised at a lower house level. So that way you must try and utilise better your upper house and as we've discussed today, because most people aren't even aware of the Senators in their state that gives you a very good reason to think that they've got some spare time to help you out.

The final thing of course is that you should always try to promote people in your community to go into politics. That you think are decent people. The greatest frustration I have with this involvement in this part of my life in this career is that people will always denigrate the political system or denigrate politicians but they never come up with a solution about what they're going to do. The question that you always propose is become involved yourself. Join the political parties, turn up to the meetings, start getting your policy agenda onto the item. I mean at National Party meetings there is nothing better than to have doctors stand up doctors or nurses or people who are involved with regional level, start driving that policy platform through. To have an active involvement. That's what the whole political party process is about. Grab an agenda within a political party and drive the policy process and make it happen. What happens though is generally that people don't want involvement but they want to complain about the consequences of not having an involvement. It is absolutely essential. As an accountant, I'm not going to sit back and develop the health policy for the National Party. I imagine there have got to be some doctors out there to develop the health policy, some nurses out there to drive the health policy for the National Party. Maybe that's your job. Maybe you should be on my case in the National Party driving the health policy for the National Policy. Coming up with a policy platform and then basically landing it on my desk and saying – Barnaby, this is a policy platform for the National Party on health and you are to follow it. And I go into the Chamber – I go to the Joint party Meeting and say – well I'm elected on this platform. This is it. As you know in Queensland the National Party is elected in their own right for the Senate and you say this is it, we've got to drive this issue forward. I have now got a contractual commitment to you to try and drive this



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agenda forward. It's very hard but it's a good return. Now if you're smart you'll have one on the National Party, one on the Labor Party, one on the Liberal Party and throw a couple more around the edges. No matter which way you go you're going to get your way aren't you? So that is the ultimate commitment to try to achieve an objective.

That will do. If there are any questions I'm only too happy to answer them.