

JUST TAKE FLORIDA — PLEASE!

It is often said, of the Northern Territory, that “we do things differently up here”. It’s a way of explaining our oddities to our friends and colleagues down south. It’s probably said in reverse (with a lot of eye rolling) when other Australians try and explain us.

But, let’s face it, after watching the shenanigans surrounding the US presidential elections, there’s nothing really at all remarkable about the NT.

Just take Florida — please!

It started, of course, with the US media getting it all wrong: first calling the election for Gore; then calling it for Bush; then deciding they hadn’t got a clue. What they could have done with a Graeme Richardson on deck!

Since then it has been lawyers at twenty paces in every direction you can look. And overarching all this has been the arcane nature of voting in the US.

Unlike Oz, which has its voting overseen by electoral commissions at the very least controlled on a state basis, it seems that every two-bit county has local control, over everything from the design of the ballots through to the form of casting votes. It effectively means, for example, that the 450 odd counties in Florida have 450 odd different forms of voting and counting. And this from the greatest and most powerful democracy the world has seen!

Then there’s the lawyers themselves. I understand the lawyer acting for Gore, a former federal prosecutor, was the same counsel that backed Cuban Floridians in the quaint notion that it was OK for the US to kidnap a boy from his father. After losing heavily in a drugs case, it was this same lawyer — somewhat in his cups — who bit a waitress. And now he is representing the man who would lead this most powerful nation. It makes the Territory profession look positively tame.

Not that the other side has covered itself with glory. Various Republican lawyers have been in the courts arguing, in all seriousness, that to go back and check votes by hand was undemocratic. Despite clear evidence the machine counted vote — in both directions — has been inaccurate, I heard one such lawyer complaining that it was unjust “because it would introduce human error”. Hello?

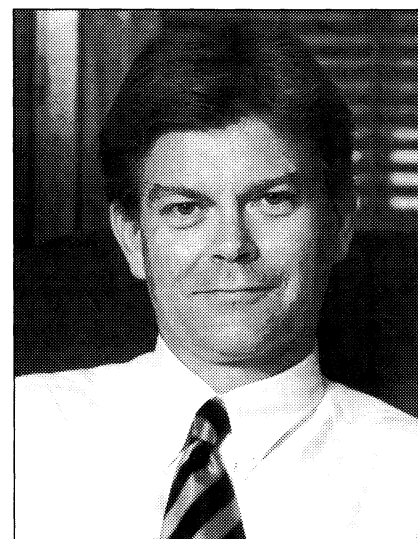
As a mate of mine — who over the years has been involved in organising many elections — observed to me: “if the greatest nation on earth can be so spectacularly hopeless in getting it right, how can I ever be wrong?”

As Gore said the other day: “God bless America!” She had better, it certainly needs it.

The last year has been an eventful one for the local profession and the administration of justice in the Northern Territory, but I won’t labour the point here.

No, this doesn’t mean I am getting soft in my old age, just that there are more enjoyable things to contemplate as we roller coast our way to the festive season.

First, a few Christmas thankyou’s and best wishes for people in the coming year. In this I would particularly like to thank the staff - not

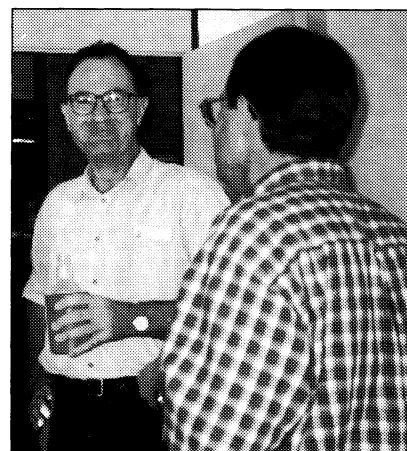


Jon Tippet, Law Society President

just of the Law Society — but those who are often overlooked in the machinery: those who toil away in the courts and those who work so hard in the Territory’s firms and chambers, big and small. They, perhaps more than any of us, are well aware there is not too much that is glamorous about the trade we ply.

Next in this list must be our long suffering partners. Surely the main reason why many more of us remain undivorced is their dread at having to deal with yet another member of the profession in extricating themselves from positions in which, to paraphrase the late Princess Di, there are three of us in our relationships, with the law being a dominant partner.

Finally, to the Council and membership of the NT Law Society. In wishing you a safe and merry yuletide I would also like to extend the hope that next year brings happiness and prosperity to you all.



Mark Hunter and Phil Jamieson joined the Balance party at the Law Society office on Wednesday 15 November 2000



Balance hosted a party to thank contributors and supporters, including from left Jon Tippet, Stewart Brown, Chips Mackinolty, Melanie Little and Peter Tiffin