

ARTHUR SINODINOS:

Doors haven't yet closed on Costello

PETER Costello may not remind you of Gwyneth Paltrow. But just like her in the 1998 film Sliding Doors, he has more than one possible future. In that film, Paltrow gets to live out two possible versions of her future. The story turns on whether she misses the Tube train or not.

In the first version she catches the train and meets a handsome stranger, then goes home to find her loathsome boyfriend two-timing her with his ex. She goes off with her train mate.

In the second version, she misses the train, is mugged and when she gets home, suspects nothing is amiss and ends up supporting her deadbeat boyfriend.

Paltrow's character faced two options but Costello potentially faces three.

The most conventional choice is that he retires from parliament at the next election to pursue a career in the private sector. He is already on the World Bank anti-corruption panel.

Other advisory roles in the private sector and academe will likely come his way and he is patron of a number of charities.

He could reflect further on the lessons of public life and perhaps write more books. He is a passionate Victorian and will no doubt lend his weight to various worthy Melbourne causes. Unlike those in Sydney, Melbourne's elite do appear to pull together more in the city or state's interest. That would be a very useful contribution to public life without the stresses and strains of the constant media spotlight and intrusions on family and personal time.

A second possible life is the Colin Barnett option. This is based on the remarkable events in the lead-up to Western Australia's last state election. The state opposition appeared to be a shambles. The then leader, Troy Buswell, was under constant attack from the state Labor government and the media and was forced to resign from the leadership.

Barnett stepped up to the plate. Alan Carpenter, the Labor premier, seeking to copy Malcolm Fraser in 1983, pounced and announced an election. The rest is history.

Why did Barnett win? First, Labor seemed to have no plan for capitalising on the resources bounty of the state and even appeared anti-development during the campaign (on uranium mining, for example).

There was a perception that the benefits of the resources boom had been squandered so that people in Western Australia did not feel better off. The



Liberal Party had managed to maintain a pro-development stance, notwithstanding its internal ructions.

The influence of Brian Burke resurfaced and denied Labor clear air for much of the time.

Importantly, Barnett was very well prepared for his second tilt at the leadership. He had been a successful minister and his roller-coaster ride in the previous campaign turned out to be an excellent dress rehearsal. He had no doubt learned from the mishandling of the policy on canals to Perth and controversy over costings.

When he went to the backbench, he literally started his "scribblings on the beach" about state policies and politics. So when he became leader again, he had thought deeply about his approach to government.

A similar option has been posited for

Costello at the federal level.

It is not impossible for the Coalition to win the next federal election. Heavy favourites can come a cropper if the electorate starts to sniff government hubris. In those circumstances, the logical response of oppositions is to invite the electorate to "send a message" to Canberra, and if enough of them do so it can tip the balance.

Costello is a powerful advocate, but is the electorate willing to listen? In any case, Malcolm Turnbull is a fighter who has seen his corporate and political life flash before his eyes more than once. These are the risks that an experienced politician such as Costello would carefully weigh up.

There is a third option for Costello.

He will dismiss it in a nanosecond but it builds on his experience in Canberra to extend his service to Australian politics. He can go into Victorian state politics and potentially become the next premier of Victoria.

While federal politicians like to scoff at the states, they still do many useful things. Many of the greatest challenges we face in service delivery are the responsibility of state governments.

Costello's experience as chairman of the expenditure review committee examining every nook and cranny of public spending, including the intricacies of federal-state financial relations, makes him superbly well-equipped to tackle these issues.

I recently attended a talk by Kathy Alexander, the very impressive chief executive of the City of Melbourne.

One point that stuck in my mind was that most of the infrastructure that will service Melbourne up to 2030 is al-

ready in place. New infrastructure spending is required, but overall system efficiency will be largely determined by the productivity of what is already there.

Imagine the gains from a determined drive to optimise work practices and introduce other efficiencies.

This year the state Labor government will have been in power for a decade and, like all long-lived governments, is carrying its fair share of baggage. While there has been a leadership change, there has been continuity in most policy areas. The electorate may well be prepared to listen to the alternative.

The same happened in 1999 in Victoria. The voters appreciated the changes that Jeff Kennett's Liberal government had made to Victoria after the misery of the Cain-Kirner period. But after seven years, some matters of style and the treatment of regional Victoria vis-a-vis Melbourne were starting to grate.

Kennett was still odds-on to win the state election and these expectations probably tempted many voters to send a message to him. Labor switched from the hard-working, long-serving John Brumby to the relatively new and fresh-faced Steve Bracks, who sealed the deal.

Perhaps Costello can have a similar game-changing effect on state politics. Imagine a COAG in 2011 with Barnett, Costello and NSW's Barry O'Farrell tackling the feds on the great issues of commonwealth-state relations.

Because Costello is relatively young, this option does not preclude a return to federal politics in due course.

Article from: The Australian

Edward, last of the brothers Kennedy

EDWARD Kennedy, known as the Lion of the US Senate, was the patriarch of the Democratic Party and a champion of the downtrodden who personally oversaw hundreds of laws to improve the lot of Americans in health, welfare and voting rights. Senator Kennedy, died aged 77, after suffering brain cancer, also played a significant role as a political godfather to Barack Obama.

At a critical early stage in January last year, he gave his endorsement to the young senator from Illinois to become the first African-American president.

Then at the Democratic national convention in Denver last August, he delivered a stirring speech of support for Mr Obama that brought delegates to their feet.

"I have come here tonight to stand with you to change America, to restore its future, to rise to our best ideals and to elect Barack Obama president of the United States," he said.

For all his achievements, Senator Kennedy's life was steeped in personal sadness - the loss of his two brothers to assassins' bullets and multiple family tragedies involving himself and members of his extended family.

Mr Obama said yesterday an important chapter in US history had come to an end and the US had lost a great leader who "picked up the torch of his fallen brothers and became the greatest US senator of our time".

Mr Obama said he and his wife, Michelle, were "heartbroken to learn of the death of our dear friend Senator Ted Kennedy".

Senator Kennedy was the president who never was. After his two older brothers, president John F. Kennedy and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, were

assassinated in the 1960s, the mantle inevitably passed to Ted Kennedy to run for the White House.

The youngest Kennedy, known for his womanising and drinking, was held back by the disgrace of his responsibility for the drowning death of Mary Jo Kopechne late one night in 1969.

Despite going on to be the third-longest serving member of the US Senate, he never recovered politically after driving off a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island with the young woman in the back seat of his car. He pleaded guilty to leaving the scene of an accident and received a two-month suspended sentence.

Senator Kennedy endured much criticism after failing to report the accident to police for 10 hours. He claimed he had become exhausted while repeatedly trying to rescue Kopechne from the sunken car and gone to bed.

Senator Kennedy was tipped as a contender for president many times and finally announced he would run against president Jimmy Carter in 1979 before pulling out after a short, disastrous campaign in which he failed to coherently explain why he wanted to stand.

He had been ill and absent from the Senate for most of the year after cancer treatment. He last appeared in public at the White House in April, looking on as Mr Obama signed a national service bill that bore his name.

"An important chapter in our history has come to an end. Our country has lost a great leader, who picked up the torch of his fallen brothers and became the greatest United States senator of our time."

Senator Kennedy was the only one of his brothers to live to old age.