

Citation for the award of the Degree of Doctor of the University (DUniv)

Hon Dr Brendan John Nelson BMBS *Flinders*, FRACP (Hon), FAMA

Dr Brendan John Nelson is one of Flinders University's most distinguished medical graduates.

Dr Nelson was the Federal president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) from 1993 to 1995. He served as a member of the House of Representatives from 1996 until 2009, representing the New South Wales electorate of Bradfield. He was the Minister for Education, Science and Training from 2001 to 2006 and Minister for Defence from 2006 to 2007. Following the 2007 election, Dr Nelson was elected leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party and Opposition. In August 2009 he announced his retirement from politics. In September 2009, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced the appointment of Dr Nelson as the next Australian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union. He would also be Australia's representative to NATO and hold a special commission to the World Health Organisation.

Born in Melbourne in 1958, in his infancy Dr Nelson's family moved to Launceston. Early in his teenage years they relocated to Adelaide where he attended first, Modbury High School and then St Ignatius College where he matriculated. Having initially commenced an economics degree at Adelaide University, he subsequently moved to Flinders University to undertake and complete his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery.

After graduation and postgraduate experience at the Flinders Medical Centre, Dr Nelson worked as a general practitioner in Hobart from 1986 until 1994. In 1990 he was elected president of the Tasmanian Branch of the AMA and in 1991, vice president of the federal AMA. He took up a strong and principled stand against tobacco advertising and sponsorship of sport, pursuing a relentless campaign to pressure politicians for legislative change, banning all advertising, increasing cigarette taxes and promoting health education. In 1993, Dr Nelson, at the age of 34 was elected the youngest ever federal president of the Australian Medical Association. He made Aboriginal Health, the effects of unemployment on health and a range of public health initiatives his highest priority. In October 1994, under his leadership, the World Conference on Tobacco and Health in Paris unanimously adopted the AMA resolution calling for a formal United Nations Charter for tobacco control.

In 1995, he won preselection for the seat of Bradfield. He continued his advocacy against Aboriginal disadvantage, and travelled to impoverished areas of Nairobi and Kenya on behalf of World Vision to use his position to draw attention to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.

Dr Nelson was elected as the member for Bradfield in the 1996 which also elected John Howard as Prime Minister. In 2001 Dr Nelson was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence. Following the 2001 election he was promoted to Cabinet with the senior portfolio of Minister for Education, Science and Training. He drove transformational reform of Australia's higher education system and introduced national standards and consistency to Australian schools. On 24 January 2006, he was appointed Minister for Defence where he oversaw a major programme of modernisation of Australia's defence capability and significant military deployments, including East Timor.

Following the defeat of the Howard government at the 2007 federal election, he was elected Liberal Party leader and therefore, Leader of the Opposition. He led his party to support the historic 2008 parliamentary Apology to Indigenous Australians. He served as leader of the opposition until 16 September 2008.

Dr Brendan Nelson is one of our university's distinguished alumni and continues to serve our nation as an ambassador and Australia's representative to the World Health Organisation and NATO.