

I don't think that's appropriate." In 1994 Bannon accepted an appointment to the ABC Board which was his first foray into any form of office. It was criticised on partisan political grounds but not because it was John Bannon.

"It wasn't high-profile, it was to do a job," Bannon says of his five years on the board. His other official duties since 2000 have been to serve on the South Australian Cricket Association Board under former Howard minister Ian McLachlan. Last year he was elected to the Board of Cricket Australia and occasionally runs into John Howard, where they confine their discussions to play on the ground and a shared enthusiasm for the political process. He is still a friend of Mike Rann, once a junior member of the Bannon cabinet, but does not presume to give him advice.

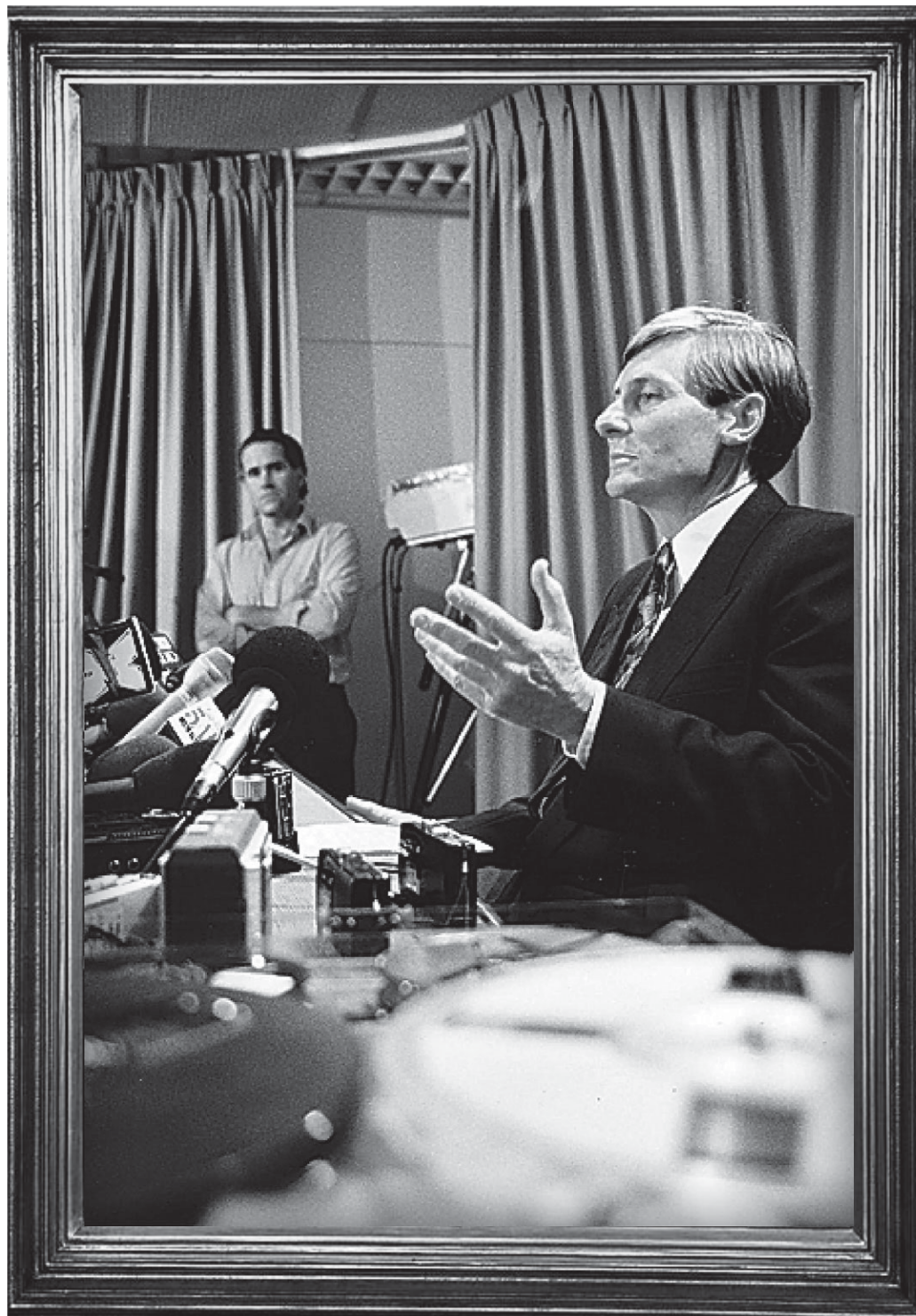
Two years ago Bannon faced a more confronting personal challenge than even the State Bank debt. He was in training for a marathon when he was diagnosed with cancer. He had surgery and a taxing period of chemotherapy, from which he has emerged in full health. "I was training and put down certain symptoms to perhaps overdoing it," he says. "It was foolish to keep on running but I enjoy it, and it's good for you. So yes, it masked the symptoms and it was probably picked up later and was a little more serious than it might have been."

Even when his political career was at its nadir, Bannon had always relied on his personal strength and fitness. He ran for pleasure and had a proud record of completing at least one marathon a year for 29 years before dropping out mid-training in 2007 to fight for his life. It was the only time he had faced a serious health problem and it shook him to the core.

"It was a very confronting experience," says Bannon, whose family suffered tragedy in 1959 when his brother was lost bushwalking in Wilpena Pound. "While I have had a number of personal and other traumas in my life, basically I have always had total confidence in my physical fitness so it was quite unnerving to find I had to attend to that as well."

He has been cleared – touch wood, he says – and has begun some gentle marathon training. He has not abandoned hope of returning to the track but is not sure if he ever will. "Whether I can run a full marathon – I'm just letting myself work through that," he says. "I haven't officially retired yet." ☒

Right: Bannon announces his resignation as Premier on September 1, 1992.



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