MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY
AT OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Media release

27 November 2026



The political yearbook returns: *Behind the Lines 2026* goes back to school

The bell has rung and the report cards are in as *Behind the Lines (BTL) 2026* opens today at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House. This year's theme, *BTL High* draws connections between the very common experience of high school and the very uncommon experience of being in parliament.

For more than three decades, the annual political cartoon exhibition has captured the defining moments of the year through the eyes of Australia's leading cartoonists. This year, we're heading back to high school, where the triumphs, blunders, rivalries and dramas of Australian politics have earned their place in the *BTL High* yearbook.

Featuring 42 of Australia's finest cartoonists, the exhibition uses humour, satire and sharp political commentary to unpack another year of political drama and intrigue, both at home and abroad.

David Pope has been named the 2026 Political Cartoonist of the Year. A third-time winner, having previously received the award in 2012 and 2022, Pope was recognised by the judging panel for his exceptional draughtsmanship, astute political commentary and clever use of references. A longstanding contributor to *Behind the Lines*, his cartoons have appeared in *The Canberra Times* since 2008 and have become a fixture of Australia's political conversation.

MoAD Director Stephanie Bull said the annual retrospective has become a favourite with visitors, offering distinct perspectives on the moments that shaped the year.

"Like any good yearbook, *Behind the Lines 2026: BTL High* captures a moment in time," Ms Bull said.

"From cost-of-living pressures and artificial intelligence to leadership changes and shifting political allegiances, the defining stories of 2026 have all earned a place in this year's exhibition."

"Political cartoons have a unique ability to make us laugh, think and question. We hope visitors leave with a deeper understanding of the year that was, and a few laughs along the way."

Chair of the Board of Old Parliament House, Barrie Cassidy, said as the building approaches its centenary, *Behind the Lines* provides an opportunity to reflect on what has changed in Australian politics, and what hasn't.

"The fashions are different, the technology is different and the faces are different. But ambition, rivalry, ego, idealism and the occasional political mishap have been with us all along," Mr Cassidy said.

"This year's exhibition includes political cartoons from 1927, offering a fascinating glimpse into how Australians viewed politics a century ago. Shown alongside contemporary works, they remind us that political cartoonists have been helping Australians understand the theatre of politics for a very long time."

Behind the Lines curator Matthew Jones said the exhibition showcases 127 of the year's best cartoons, capturing both the headlines and the deeper currents shaping Australian politics.

"It's often said that satirists and political cartoonists speak truth to power. I'm not sure that always adequately expresses the subtleties and the effectiveness of their work," Mr Jones said.

"Political cartoons often offer absurd answers or explanations for the actions of those in power – these sometimes can't be true, and we know this. But they do send up a smoke signal that something's not quite right and that other people see it too, and we feel validated in our concern."

Mr Jones also reflected on a significant year for the cartooning community.

"This year we lost one of Australia's finest political cartoonists, Jon Kudelka. His work was admired not only by readers, but by fellow cartoonists. As First Dog on the Moon observed in his moving tribute cartoon, *My Friend Jon*, 'I was always jealous of how fast his beautiful brain went and how cartooning seemed so easy for him'. That tribute is included in this year's exhibition."

"2026 also marked the end of an era, with Cathy Wilcox concluding her remarkable 37-year career at the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A giant of Australian political cartooning, Cathy's work is also featured in the exhibition.

“We appreciate our cartoonists and their contribution to our democracy, now more than ever.”

This year's *In Focus* section highlights cartoons from 1927, depicting the opening of the then Provisional Parliament House. It has been curated by MoAD Senior Curator, Anne-Marie Condé.

A selection of cartoons from *Behind the Lines* will tour the country, taking the works to a wider audience. The tour is generously supported by the Federal Government through the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program (NCITO). It will travel to:

- Albury Library Museum, NSW: 13 March to 23 May 2027
- Bribie Island Seaside Museum, QLD: 12 June to 8 August 2027
- Old Treasury Building, VIC: 3 September to 24 October 2027
- State Library of South Australia, SA: 5 November 2027 to 21 January 2028

Behind the Lines 2026: BTL High will be on display at MoAD at Old Parliament House, Canberra from 27 November 2026 until November 2027. Entry is free from 9am to 5pm daily (except Christmas Day).

David Pope, 2026 Political Cartoonist of the Year

David Pope has been named the 2026 Cartoonist of the Year. Pope is a Canberra based cartoonist who has been drawing political cartoons for *The Canberra Times* since 2008. David initially started drawing cartoons in the 1980s and worked as a freelance cartoonist and illustrator for many years.

David is a third time winner of the award, having previously won in 2012 and 2022.The *Behind the Lines* judging panel singled out David’s works for their excellent draughtsmanship, astute political commentary and clever use of references. His cartoons captured many of the year's defining debates and developments, from data centres and climate change to Coalition leadership turmoil, monoculturalism and the government's digital policy agenda.

This year's judging panel comprised satirist Mark Humphries; cartoon academic Robert Phiddian; Cathy Wilcox, President of the Australian Cartoonists Association; Matt Golding, last year's Political Cartoonist of the Year; Anne-Marie Condé, Senior Curator at MoAD; and our BTL curator, Matthew Jones.

Images
Available here.

Media enquiries
media@moadoph.gov.au or 02 6270 8120.

Caption: *Behind the Lines*, the annual political cartoon exhibition, opens today at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House.