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Oxford Word of the Month – February: doing the doors

noun: (of a politician) giving doorstep interviews to the media, especially at Parliament House.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

A favourite tactic of journalists seeking comment from politicians is to conduct a brief interview with them as they enter or leave a building. In Australia this kind of interview has been known since the early 1980s as *doorstopping* or a *doorstop* ('I *doorstopped* the Premier, who ruled out an early election'; 'cabinet members didn't hold the usual *doorstops* before their weekly meeting'). In theory the *doorstop* is an impromptu occasion, but it is often used as an opportunity for a party or government to deliver a scripted message. It is a familiar piece of theatre on the nightly news.

In the twenty-first century we find a new term for this activity: **doing the doors** ('the Member for Barcoo is **doing the doors** today'). The term casts politicians as agents seeking to be interviewed, rather than as innocent victims of *doorstopping*. The earliest recorded evidence shows that the 'impromptu' interview is often planned:

A new Labor backbencher has admitted the federal Government has a roster of MPs primed and ready to deliver the message of the day to waiting media as they walk through the doors of Parliament House every morning.

'Doing the doors' gives politicians a chance to comment on the issues of the day, to turn round negative stories in the papers and breakfast radio and TV, or add to their opponents' discomfort. (The Australian, 19 June 2008)

Doing the doors in the political sense is an Australian English term. An older meaning exists for the same expression in Australia and elsewhere; it describes the job of a bouncer, who controls the intake of patrons at clubs and pubs, or the job of a door person, who sells tickets at the door of an event or performance.

A sense of performance is certainly inherent in the Australian meaning, and critical reviews are not uncommon. One commentator referred to the politicians who 'do the doors' at the bidding of their leaders as 'puppets reciting their prepared statements when allocated the task of "doing the doors" for the television grabs'. (*Crikey*, 10 June 2011) Another described doing the doors as 'the cute ritual of

pollies lining up at the main entrance on the Reps side of the building to deploy pithy one-liners for the assembled media hacks'. (*West Australian*, 1 December 2009)

But **doing the doors** continues to be an important ritual for media and politicians, and, despite cold winters and frosty mornings in the nation's capital, the show must go on:

Frost lay on the ground. Hot air balloons hung in the sky. At 7.50am in the national capital, Eric Abetz was doing the doors. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2010)

Doing the doors will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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