



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 2 March 1999

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Deaths of Mr R. T. McLean, MLA, and Mr L. J. Yewdale, MLA

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (10.06 a.m.): It is also my privilege to rise to support the motion of condolence, moved by the Premier and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, for Ron McLean and Les Yewdale. We have just heard an extremely colourful background on both of those gentlemen. There is no doubt that the current Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing has an in-depth understanding of their contributions to the Labor Party and to this place as both a Minister and, of course, a member for the area. It is fitting that Ron McLean raised thoroughbred horses, because there is no doubt in my mind that Ron himself was a Labor thoroughbred. I think that is what the Minister has just outlined.

The fact that Ron rose all the way from an apprentice in the Department of Works to the Minister of the same department is an inspiring story that should serve as a really good example for our young people today. It shows that, no matter what your background, you can play a part in the running of this State if you are willing to put in the effort. Wayne Goss said that many people underestimated Ron McLean's abilities. Wayne Goss gave Ron McLean the task of making the Department of Administrative Services a more commercial operation. I think it was a Ministry that he filled wonderfully well. He performed a difficult task very well.

Ron McLean was a Minister during my first term in Parliament. I found him an excellent person to deal with as a new member. I am glad that John Lutteral is here today, and the member for Logan, John Mickel, who was the senior policy adviser to Ron McLean at that time. I can relate to what the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing said a moment ago. I had some issues with some schoolkids in Upper Brookfield in my electorate. One day, Ron and the two Johns and I were able to sit down, without any rancour or politics—and they did not vote that way, either—and resolve some issues that are still benefiting the kids and the people of that area today. I think that Ron McLean was precisely that kind of individual. That is something to which all of us must aspire.

In his maiden speech on 12 March 1981, Ron, who was always the champion of the underdog, called on the Government to build more units for aged pensioners. As the Minister for Public Works and Housing, I was privileged and delighted to preside over a record building program for aged care. I think that Ron would have thoroughly approved of that particular process.

When Ron McLean retired from Parliament for health reasons, he expressed the concern that there was a worrying trend that Governments were becoming dominated by academics. I do not know about what happens in the Labor Party; but in the Liberal Party, when people refer to academics, they are usually referring to lawyers and doctors! He said that it was best that there be a balance, a mixture of blue and white collar workers, in the Parliaments of Australia, that that was the way to get the best parliamentary government. I firmly believe that there will always be room in this House for blue-collar workers of the calibre of Ron McLean. On the behalf of the Liberal Party, I pass on my condolences to Ron's wife and family.

As to Les Yewdale—unfortunately, I did not know him. He left Parliament the year I came in, at the 1989 election. Although I did not have the privilege of knowing him personally, I am told on the very best authority—his electorate secretary for 16 years, Thelma Humphris—that Les never turned anyone away from his office, that he did his utmost to help them. Les was a quiet achiever. He was never one

to blow his own trumpet. As all of us believe, Les believed that it was his job to serve his constituents. Whenever he was able to help them, he never sought publicity for his efforts.

Les' work was obviously appreciated by his constituents, because—as the previous speaker said—he held his seat for five elections before retiring because of ill health. It was interesting to hear the Minister for Public Works and Housing talk about the historical reasons that Les was the only Labor member to be able to increase his margin at the 1974 election when the Labor Party was reduced to the cricket team. Not only was it a tremendous effort; it is my understanding that he always liked to remind people of that. As we go on, the relevant facts of history sometimes get embellished. That was one of the accomplishments that he thought was worthy of other people remembering.

In his younger days, Les was a top Rugby League player in Rockhampton. His later efforts in the administration of the game saw him awarded life membership of the Queensland Rugby League. Les, like Ron, was not all biff and barge; he was also a very active member of the peace movement. Les Yewdale served the people of Rockhampton North and the people of Queensland with distinction. On behalf of the Liberal Party, I pass on my condolences to his wife, Marge, and their family.
