



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

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

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (10.17 a.m.): It is a pleasure to stand in support of my former employer. The great irony, of course, is that, although Ronnie stood up for the workers, there were those of us who had to work for him. By any measure, he was a remarkable personality and a humanitarian. On behalf of the staff who worked with him—some of whom are in the gallery, and all of whom were at his funeral—let me say that it was a great honour to work with him. In fact, there were many days when I think it was a sin to take the money for having to work with Ronnie McLean. There were very many memorable days—great days, in fact. I can think back to Charleville when we were out there in a tent in all the mud trying to put that place back together. Ronnie never lost that common touch—that human touch—as he dealt with both his staff and the people out there, who were going through enormous hardship.

There was a great human side to Ron McLean—a great laughter, a bonhomie that was infectious. It certainly infected all of us. As well as that common touch, he had many interests that, until I worked with him, I had never brushed up against. For example, I can remember when he first took me to the races. He said, "Come on, mate, we'll go to the races." The whole staff had to go. He had a horse named Just A Diamond. He said, "Look, Mickel, put some money on it. No, you've got to put it on to win." I thought, "God! I've never put any money on a horse." He showed me how to do that. The thing bolted in by half a head. He said, "See, mate: this horseracing game, you put 10 bucks down and you get 60 bucks back, and you haven't discovered that yet."

I can remember also that he took us to a golfing tournament. It was an Ambrose; it was your best shot. I had never before picked up a golf club. He took me out and he showed me how to wave the thing around. He said, "Righto, mate, your turn." Everybody packed around that day. I was waving the club. As I waved it backwards, I connected with the ball and the ball shot 30 metres backwards. It was my best shot all day! He stood there and looked at me and said, "Jeez, mate. I've never seen a shot like that."

The Minister, Robert Schwarten, said that Ron McLean had a highly developed and sensitive feel for the downtrodden. As Robert said also, it applied no matter where those people lived. I notice that my friend the member for Moggill alluded to something before. I can remember that incident very, very well. I also remember that one of his first acts was to go out to the Inala district where the Minister for Primary Industries and I had been schoolteachers some years before. In all that time, we could never get a darned thing for the school. I remember in protest we both painted our classrooms red, white and blue because we could never get the things fixed up. One of Ronnie's first acts was to go out there and give money for the Inala State School swimming pool, because they were always \$10,000 short. To my recollection, that is still the only swimming pool that services a district that, frankly, is the size of any country town. Ronnie did that: his first act.

His second act was far more memorable. He went to the Inala State High School which, at that stage, was quite bereft. In fact, one of the ceilings was falling in. I remember he carpeted the bloke from Administrative Services afterwards. He asked, "How in heaven's name could these schools end up like this?" The fellow said——

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr MICKEL:** I am being charitable. Ron McLean said, "How could have these schools ended up like this?" The fellow said, "We were given a colour coding, and the colour coding for Inala meant that we were never to do anything in the area." That led to the most memorable incident I think in that first session of Parliament. Those members who were here will remember Ron McLean coming in and answering a question where he unveiled a special electorate works program. There were 270 programs, all of them in National Party electorates, except one. I think that was in the electorate of Cook, but that was a Commonwealth project. I have to be honest with the Leader of the Opposition and say that when he went back downstairs after that performance I think the Opposition members were all called fleas and all of that sort of stuff.

The other one that, of course, is featured in the Premier's book, *In The Arena*—a Pulitzer Prize winning book, Mr Premier, read across the civilised world, certainly from West End to Milton, anyway—is the incident that is described in the first page dealing with the Barooka Special School. That school was a complete disgrace. I must say that, on instruction after he left the Premier that day, Ron McLean came back and had the place fixed up within two days.

The other story that is told is the Birdsville pool story. There is actually another string to that story. The reason they could not get the pool, apart from a little bit of shortfall in the funding, was that the department of the day insisted that there be a grandstand with the pool. I want to say this to the member for Gregory: Ronnie gave the people of Birdsville that pool only on the basis that they would build a grandstand. So we have been steadily watching the population build up and we are faithfully assured that, by about the year 4020, there will be a population big enough to warrant the grandstand.

I have not seen John Lutteral this morning, but I have certainly cleared this story with Anne McLean. We were fearful that what I am about to say next would have brought down the Goss Government. It was an incident that occurred in Mount Isa. Actually, to be perfectly honest, it was to do with St Patrick's Day in Mount Isa. Those members who have been to Mount Isa will know that it has the largest Irish club in the world. We were there studying a whole lot of Government facilities, of course, and unfortunately it coincided with St Patrick's Day and the whole town was there. Ever mindful of Government money, we got a taxi to the festivities that night. At about two in the morning, the festivities had ended and the whole town, including us, because Minister McGrady was still busy with the 800 people who had gathered around him, went in search of a taxi. After about an hour and a half of a futile search for a taxi I said, "Leave it with me, I will go and find somebody who can give us a lift back." This guy came up to me and asked, "Are you looking for a taxi?" We said, "Yes." He said, "I will give you a lift back. Just wait down in the back of the car park there." I said to Ronnie and John Lutteral who was with me, "Listen, I have got a lift back. We will be right. We will just go down and wait."

Ronnie said to me, "Listen, mate, if this bloke asks where we work, just tell him we work for the Government. Do not tell him who the hell I am." I said, "Okay, it will be sweet." So we walked down the back and the bloke showed up drinking a stubby. I thought, "God, this is going to be choice." He said, "Over here", and he pointed to a Mini Minor. So the three of us, that is Ronnie, Lutteral and me, had to get into the back of this Mini. Ronnie sat in the middle, so members can imagine that we were all squashed. The bloke with the stubby did not get in the driver's seat. He said, "Look, I have got my brother, he will drive for you. I have had a few to drink." I thought, "That is handy, anyway." The Mini is barely above the ground, and the guy started up the car, kangaroo-hopped backwards and stopped. I thought, "Oh, God." Members can imagine that, with Ronnie's weight, the whole car was shaking. This bloke kangaroo-hopped the car four times, every time snuffing the car, just to get to the exit. While they were fiddling around the bloke said, "Mate, look, he will be better when he gets his driver's licence." We thought, "God, if Borbidge finds out about this, we are in it deep."

While they were fiddling around trying to start the car and trying to give quick lessons, Ronnie leaned over towards me and said, "Mickel, I am going to kill you." In the end, after many kangaroo hops, we got out. On the edge of town, Ronnie said to the bloke, "Yes, that is our hotel just over there. If you stop right here, we will get out." To this day, I do not know whether that poor bloke knows who the passengers were in the back seat. Until right now, we have never been game to tell anybody for fear of major embarrassment.

In closing, I simply want to say this: the staff and friends of John F. Kennedy wrote a book called *The Pleasure of His Company*. With Ronnie McLean, it would be very easy to sit down and write a book of the same title. I will say this of Ronnie: he never forgot who he was; most of all, he never forgot where he was going back to. That is the great tribute that we can pay to him as people who worked for him. One of the greatest things when he retired as a Minister was that all the staff of the department willingly came out and gave a present to their man, their Minister. So to Anne, I say on behalf of those who worked with him that it was a great honour and that we will miss him greatly, I know, as much as you will.

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