



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 17 August 1999

MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE

Deaths of Mr C. R. Rappolt and Mr R. B. J. Pilbeam

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.42 a.m.), by leave without notice: I move—

- "1. That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this State by the late Charles Robert Rappolt, a former Member of the Parliament of Queensland.
2. That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the family of the deceased gentleman the above resolution, together with an expression of the sympathy of the Members of the Parliament of Queensland, for the loss they have sustained."

I also move—

- "1. That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this State by the late Reginald Byron Jarvis Pilbeam, a former Member of the Parliament of Queensland.
2. That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the family of the deceased gentleman the above resolution, together with an expression of the sympathy of the Members of the Parliament of Queensland, for the loss they have sustained."

In relation to Charles Rappolt, who was elected to this Parliament along with all of us on 13 June 1998, it is fair to say that, to an extent, it is sad and unfortunate that Charles Rappolt was ill prepared for life as a politician. In a few short months last year, he joined the One Nation Party just before the election, became the party's candidate for Mulgrave, won the seat in the 13 June State election and resigned less than five months later on 4 November. He said that stress, enormous personal pressures and ill health had become too much for him to cope with and that he had not given enough thought to his decision to enter politics. That is what Charles himself said. He complained that there had been death threats, people spat at him and the media had attacked him. The effect on his family life had been devastating and he had sent his young son to stay with the boy's grandparents.

When he resigned, he sent me a personal letter outlining the reasons for his resignation, saying—

"My family and health have to take first priority, as I would not be able to last much longer in the political arena.

I apologise for the inconvenience my resignation will cause to the people of Mulgrave, however I see no other way to overcome the situation."

In his letter he said that, while agreeing with some One Nation ideologies, he no longer felt the party had been going long enough to sort out its own problems, let alone the problems of others. Later, he was found in a distressed state and admitted to the Cairns Base Hospital. I visited him privately while he was in the hospital because, although I have had no sympathy for the policies of One Nation, Charles Rappolt was basically a knockabout, decent Australian whose heart was in the right place. He needed all the help and support that he could get.

I first got to know him when we held our first community Cabinet meeting in Mulgrave. Of course, I had met him informally when he became a member. That community Cabinet meeting was

held at the end of July last year, when the Cabinet went to Mulgrave for that first two-day opportunity for all members of the public to speak to Ministers of their choice. Mr Rappolt was there as the local member. We had invited him and he came. He was dressed in his soccer referee's uniform, because he was also a dedicated coach and referee for junior sports and we were meeting at a sports club surrounded by pitches. Later that day he was going to do some refereeing, so he turned up in his referee's outfit together with his whistle—not that we needed his whistle; it was a very orderly gathering of Cabinet. Mr Rappolt stood up there to tell us more should be done for junior sports.

In his maiden parliamentary speech, Charles stood up for the battling small miners. He told the House that he had come to Parliament to clean up the mining mess left by the previous Government, which had discouraged mining and had caused unemployment in the area. He was the One Nation spokesman for Mines, Energy and Regional Development and Tourism, Sport and Racing. He was also a member of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee.

Mr Rappolt was born on 23 August 1939 in Cairns. He was a member of the armed services between 1957 and 1961. He listed other occupations as commercial pilot, mine manager, environmental auditor and a prospector/financier. He is survived by his three children.

I want to add a couple of things. I think most people in this House appreciate the hurly-burly of politics. It does put an enormous personal burden on individuals and their families, something that is too often forgotten in the day-to-day hurly-burly of politics. Although Charles was a member of One Nation and I did not share their philosophies and I do not on a range of matters, I have to say that he was a decent Australian. He was the typical Aussie battler. He was someone who, on a personal level—particularly through a number of the conversations I had with him—I grew to quite like. When I visited him in the Cairns hospital he had been there under difficult circumstances as we all know. I will not put those on the record. I met his partner at the time. He was endeavouring to put his life back together. I could see a man who was under enormous stress, a man who was trying to come to grips with not only politics but also what had happened to him. I think any decent Queenslander would feel a degree of sorrow and concern for what happened to Charles during those particular times.

As we all know, Charles died recently in New Zealand. I made some appropriate comments at the time publicly. One of his children contacted my office to express their appreciation that, through all the hurly-burly of—as they saw it—unpleasantness, at least some kind words had been said about Charles during this process. I know that other members today will find it in their hearts to say something kind about Charles, bearing in mind the circumstances of his untimely and unfortunate death. To his children I say that they can be proud of their dad. When he was in here for that short period he did advocate strongly for the small miners. He was committed to improving the circumstances surrounding small miners. He was very genuine in his attempts. I hope his family is able to come through these very difficult circumstances. I extend my sympathy and that of the House to his whole family.

In relation to Reginald Byron Jarvis Pilbeam, I want to say that he was "Mr Rockhampton". In many senses, he was larger than life. There was nothing plain or simple about the man known by many as "Mr Rockhampton", that is, Rex Pilbeam. He was a man of big ideas, colourful opinions and the will to get things done. He was born Reginald Byron Jarvis Pilbeam on 30 October 1907 in Longreach, Queensland. He was the son of a grazier. Reginald was educated in Emu Park State School and Rockhampton State High School and went on to gain accountancy and secretarial qualifications through external studies. He became an accountant and public servant before serving from 1942 to 1945 in the infantry, becoming a sergeant and being stationed in New Guinea and the Solomons. For three years after the war, he was secretary of the Warwick Show Society. By 1952, he was standing as an Independent candidate in the local government elections in Rockhampton and was elected mayor, a position he held for a record 30 years, an extraordinary achievement. He was foundation president of the Central Queensland Local Government Association. In 1960, he took on a second major role in public life, becoming the Liberal MLA for Rockhampton South, a position he held until 1969.

In his maiden speech, Mr Pilbeam spoke out about the need to develop Rockhampton and central Queensland—a theme he promoted constantly—which is why I said before that he was known as "Mr Rockhampton" and, in some people's minds, "Mr Central Queensland". In case there were members who were not sure where central Queensland was, the then new member for Rockhampton South came armed with maps, because he was determined to let everyone know where he came from. For 30 years Mr Pilbeam worked for Rockhampton, leaving it with modern roads, the Pilbeam Theatre, which I am sure most members would have seen, the Olympic-size swimming pool and many other developments. In fact, only recently, the Minister for Arts and I were at the Pilbeam Theatre during a Rockhampton Community Cabinet meeting for the opening of a major art exhibition. Indeed, it is a proud theatre—a theatre which, in my view, is one of which Rockhampton and its citizens can be very proud.

His other roles included deputy chairman of the Rockhampton Harbour Board, foundation member of the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education Council, a member of the Returned & Services League—as members would expect—and a member of the Rockhampton Jockey Club. He

was delighted to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Central Queensland. He was grandfather to 12 children, but his wife, Barbara, unfortunately died before him, as did his sons Rod and Alan.

I was discussing Mr Pilbeam with the current member for Rockhampton, the Minister Rob Swarten, only recently. Mr Swarten indicated along similar lines as I do: that he was well regarded and well respected in that community and someone who certainly will be missed. On behalf of the Parliament, I extend my sympathy and that of this House to his family and friends.
