



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 17 August 1999

**MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE**

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

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.04 a.m.): Charlie Rappolt was an unlikely MP. I am sure he would agree. He was only a short-term member of this House. It is clear from the tragic events that followed his election to this place that he was not comfortable with parliamentary life. He was in this place, in so many respects, an enigma. Outside this place he had experienced considerable material success and accumulated substantial wealth.

But, importantly, he was a member of this House for a short period of time. Still more importantly, he was sent to this place by his electors. That is the democratic test. It is that test which entitles every member of this Parliament to the courtesies of this House and to membership of the parliamentary fraternity.

On that score alone, it is a sad duty to stand here today to mark the passing of our former colleague, Charles Robert Rappolt. It is a sad task also on the human scale. We expected to know him much longer. I know these sentiments are widely held amongst all members of this House. These sentiments have been very ably expressed by the Premier, and I join with him in placing them on the record.

One of the greatest things about the Westminster parliamentary system is that inside this place—even inside this Chamber where partisanship is everything—there exists a collegiate system. We all know that partisan politics—necessary partisan politics—drives the process of Government in a parliamentary system. Yet we all know that connections exist across party lines and that even friendships and common interests sometimes run directly counter to partisan demands. That is as it should be. The chief direct result of democracy—beyond the delivery of responsible and responsive Government—is that power is exercised and from time to time changes hands without violence or even undue drama.

While Charlie Rappolt was with us in this place he was as much a member of and a participant in this collegiate system as anyone. That, too, is as it should have been. He made his maiden speech in the confidence debate that opened the proceedings of the 49th Parliament on 30 July 1998. He spoke from the heart for 18 minutes. In other later contributions he spoke with an intelligent grasp of many affairs as they affect Queensland. He was by no means a shrinking violet in the early sittings of this Parliament. He was appointed to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—a body charged with some onerous work on behalf of Queensland.

We will all of us honour his memory and promote the benefits of parliamentary democracy in the best way possible by remembering him as a colleague, a representative of the people who elected him and as a unique human being with his own strengths and, as with us all, his own failings. Our thoughts go out to those whose loss of a son, a father, a relative and a friend is most keenly felt.

Rex Pilbeam was a leader. Indeed, he adopted "Rex" as his preferred name as a young boy, convinced that as it was the Latin word for "king" it was an admirable name. Rex Pilbeam was a passionate man. He was passionate about Rockhampton. He wanted it to become a great city—and it is. He was so passionate about his city that he served as mayor for 30 years, even while for nine of them he was the Liberal member for Rockhampton South.

Rex Pilbeam was a passionate advocate, too, of causes he took to his heart. One such cause was that of Port Alma. As Ron Jay, Rockhampton's first quarantine inspector in 1968—and later chief inspector in Australia—recently told the Morning Bulletin in a tribute, Rex Pilbeam even took that cause to the Queen. Jay wrote—

"Rex Pilbeam was never one to miss an opportunity. At a meal with the Queen the subject of drinks came up. Her Majesty stated she was partial to a good port.

'We have a good port here you know,' said Rex.

'Oh,' Her Majesty said.

'Yes, Port Alma,' said Rex.

Her Majesty was quite amused."

That anecdote says a lot about Rex Pilbeam's humour as well as his championing of his region. It shows that Rockhampton was indeed fortunate to have so able an advocate for its cause as the capital city of central Queensland.

The Port Alma story shows Rex Pilbeam in his most human light. It truly was his real passion, at the expense of its near neighbour, but I am sure that in these circumstances the honourable member for Gladstone will be prepared to overlook what the citizens of her fair city might regard as a slight—and this is no better illustrated than in another anecdote. I am indebted for this story to another former member of this place, Bill Hewitt, once the Liberal member for Greenslopes.

**Mr Mackenroth:** And Chatsworth.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** And Chatsworth. As Bill Hewitt tells the story, at a Liberal parliamentary party meeting one day, Gordon Chalk told Rex that a substantial amount had been set aside for the development of Port Alma. Rex was overcome. He wept. That is a measure of the humanity of the man.

He lived a full life. He was in many ways Rex of Rockhampton—king of Rockhampton— over three decades during which the city gained the benefits of a modern infrastructure. Similar to another great mayor whose appeal to the ratepayers crossed party lines—Clem Jones in Brisbane—Rex Pilbeam sewered and paved his city. When he became mayor in 1952 only one mile of Rockhampton's road network was surfaced.

When he left the mayor's office in 1982, the city's streets had been bituminised and widened, Fitzroy barrage was in place, the road was into Mount Archer, and the city and its growing community of art lovers was graced by the Pilbeam Theatre on that glorious stretch of Quay Street beside the river. He was a pioneer of local tertiary education and, in that sense, the Central Queensland University is also his legacy.

What Rockhampton had in spades from Rex Pilbeam was an impetus to civic pride and community development. So often he was the irresistible force meeting not the immovable object—I am sure he never conceded that anything in the road of progress was ever immovable if he was pushing—but the challenge to be overcome. He was remarkable in another way: he was a conservative, a provincial Liberal—and he would never have baulked at that term "provincial"—in a strongly Labor-oriented environment. He held the seat of South Rockhampton for nine years flying that conservative banner. As the Morning Bulletin wrote in an editorial tribute to mark his passing, Rex Pilbeam was a political maverick, a solo flyer and even a bit of a dictator. The editorial went on to say—

"He was unquestionably a visionary who could see beyond the plans to the finished project and the future benefits for his city.

Friend or foe, residents could never argue his political drive and his passion for Rockhampton, and his dream to see it evolve from rural town into a city of the future.

As we stand on the cusp of a new millennium, Rockhampton last week"—

and this editorial was published on 6 August—

"was lauded by both sides of Federal politics as an exciting city of the future, a region which will succeed."

Rex Pilbeam would have been proud. Both sides of State politics, too, see Rockhampton as the present gem that it is and as the even brighter jewel all Queenslanders know that it will become. That is Rex Pilbeam's true and lasting legacy. He was a great Queenslander. There can be no higher praise than that and no higher honour.

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