



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 17 August 1999

MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE

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

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (10.22 a.m.): I join in the condolence motion for the former mayor of Rockhampton, Rex Pilbeam, and the former member of this House. At the outset I would say that in many ways Rex gave Rockhampton its bones and took it on to a new era of development. In those days, I was finding my feet in the Central Highlands. I well remember that Rex took the view that if Rockhampton was to progress, it had to have a good hinterland structure. He was continuously out and about in Clermont, Emerald, Springsure and such places.

Rex Pilbeam strongly supported the new coalmines that were being developed in the area at the time. There was some controversy over the Utah Development Company, which was an American company that was starting up coalmines in Australia. I can remember him saying, "That company will be bought by Australians." Of course, that is exactly what happened. BHP took it over. Rex supported very strongly the Fairbairn Dam and the associated cotton and citrus industries and so on. Rex was very definitely a visionary for Rockhampton, but he was also a visionary for the Central Highlands.

Rex gave me a lot of support in the early days when I was a councillor on the Belyando Shire Council and was involved in sport and all sorts of other things. I remember very well an occasion following my recent election to Parliament. A public meeting was held in Emerald, which Rex attended. I was asked to give an opinion on a matter. I had been elected to Parliament only a few weeks previously and was absolutely petrified of a certain Premier called Joh Bjelke-Petersen, so I gave a Government answer of sorts. I can still hear Rex thundering, "My God! It didn't take you long to get on the side of the Government. You're a disgrace." I thought, "Gee, that's interesting! This is the fellow who has helped me all along." That taught me the very good lesson that one should stand up and fight for one's area, irrespective of what anybody might think about it. I learned that lesson very quickly.

Rex became involved in a film called *The Buddies*, which at one point was called *The Buddies Getting Even*. I still maintain that that was one of the greatest films ever produced. It was basically about life on the gem fields, particularly fights between big miners. One of the scenes was a fight involving two backhoes or forklifts, which was very interesting. That particular film did not benefit from the promotional advantages of big personnel. Although it was a good film, it did not really take off. It would probably be fair to say that it lost money. For a long time Rex continued to show the film throughout Australia to raise money, to make sure that the people who had contributed to the film were paid. I think that that really showed what the man was like. He personally hawked that film throughout Australia to ensure that ultimately, where possible, people who had contributed to the film were paid. I think that that says more about Rex than anything else could.

The member for Rockhampton and I were very pleased to attend Rex's farewell ceremony in Rockhampton, which was a wonderful and moving event. I do not wish to repeat what everybody else has said. However, I certainly salute Rex for the help that he gave me in the early days and for the public dressing down that he gave me, which taught me in no uncertain terms how to act in the future. I have since learned that I was not the only one who received a dressing down, although it was a bit embarrassing to have it happen at a huge meeting, when I thought I had done a good job! I salute Rex for the support that he gave the Central Highlands in the early days. He simply said, "Rockhampton will be nothing without a great hinterland." He took a visionary approach. God rest his soul.