



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 16 May 2000

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Death of Mr R. Jones

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (2.55 p.m.): I support this condolence motion and I wish to place on record today that Ray Jones was indeed an excellent member for Cairns in the Parliament of Queensland. He was elected on 27 February 1965 in a by-election following the death of Watty Wallace. He was re-elected in 1966, 1969, 1974, 1977 and 1980. He then retired at the State election in October 1983. He was thereby the longest serving member for Cairns since the creation of the seat in May 1888, serving 18 years, seven months and three weeks. Ray Jones' contribution as the member for Cairns, however, was based on a history of service to the community and on his strong and clear working-class values and the quiet determination that he always had throughout his life to do his best with a minimum of fuss and, I must say, with a great amount of style and integrity.

Ray Jones was born in Cairns on 3 February 1926. His father, Davey Jones, was an engine driver at the Northern Australian Brewery and his mother was Dorothy Soilleux. Ray commenced his primary school education at Parramatta State School. The highlight of his primary education, however, was not scholastic achievement. It was the fact that Ray played in the front row of the Parramatta School Boys under seven stone division Rugby League team which defeated Gordonvale and then went on to defeat Townsville. Honourable members of this House will understand what a significant event that has always been for people in Cairns. It is worth noting that though Ray was a man of small physical stature he originally played front row. This is one of those apparent contradictions that existed throughout his life. While in general Ray was a modest man and a gentleman, it is well known that when roused or when the need arose, Ray could play front row with the best.

The outbreak of the Second World War during his high school education led to Ray's leaving school and getting a job as sweeper/cleaner at the local brewery. He moved on then to a job as a messenger boy and then to bowser boy at a local service station. By this time, however, the war was threatening Cairns and there were fears of a Japanese invasion. As a result, Ray joined the Volunteer Defence Corps with his father. Evacuated from Cairns with his family, he worked for a time in Townsville with Queensland Rail and was later transferred to Torrens Creek where at the age of 16 he played a major role assisting to extinguish a bomb dump fire which threatened to destroy the American air force base at Torrens Creek. Ray volunteered to join the party that entered the base as the bombs were exploding to endeavour to extinguish an outbreak of fire in the dump. For his part in this action, Ray was awarded the British Empire Medal (Civil Division) for bravery.

Back in Cairns in 1943, Ray joined the RAAF as air crew at the time of his 18th birthday. He served Australia with honour during the Second World War and returned to Cairns following his discharge and to Queensland Railways to continue his career. Ray met his lifelong love and partner, Fay, on New Year's Eve 1948. They were soon engaged and then married on 15 October 1949. Fay has told me how important it was to her that she and Ray were able to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary together only last year. Ray settled into work and family life in Cairns and joined the Australian Labor Party in February 1952 and was active thereafter in branch and local affairs.

It was not until 1961 that Ray decided to try politics. He stood as an alderman for the Cairns City Council in March of that year but was not successful. It is worth noting that this was the only election he ever lost. Subsequently, Ray was appointed to fill a casual vacancy on the Cairns City Council and was

then elected as an alderman in 1964. His term was cut short, however, when he stood for and was elected as the State member for Cairns in the following year. It is well known in Cairns that Ray's success as the member for Cairns was founded on his ability to organise, plan and deliver. These are, I dare say, still the skills required of a good local member, and they certainly were in the circumstances then usual for an MLA from an isolated area of the State in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ray Jones had no electorate office, so he created one under his old Queenslander house. He had no secretary, no typewriter and no telephone. There was no facsimile and certainly, of course, computers were not even on the horizon. There was no local television coverage and there was most certainly no money for advertising in the local paper. It was therefore truly grassroots, personal contact that was the only means whereby Ray could become known and make himself available to his constituents.

Those in Cairns with long memories recall that at election time Ray would take his megaphone and stand on the back of his truck on street corners and talk to the people about the issues of the time. Not always did large groups gather, so when some of these meetings were not so well attended it was put to him that they were a waste of time. "Not at all", was Ray's answer. "People driving past see you and in general, even if they don't come, people know you're there. They know you are on the job." It is right and proper that the Cairns City Council has dedicated Speaker's Corner on the Esplanade to Ray Jones.

As the member for Cairns, Ray attended Parliament for the four sessions per year that were the routine at that time. As we have heard, he took the train to Brisbane and remained in Brisbane for the entirety of each session.

Ray did not complain about the limitations of his "resourcing" as the member for Cairns. He simply found a way to deliver. His campaign manager was Tom Pyne, who had been elected to the Mulgrave Shire Council and was later to become the chairman of the Mulgrave Shire and then the mayor of the City of Cairns.

Tom tells of their efforts to offer service to the people of Yarrabah. As members may know, the Yarrabah community, which was then in the electorate of Cairns, is now some 40 minutes' drive on a sealed highway from Cairns. The road, however, did not exist in Ray's day. He and Tom took up a petition relating to construction of a road to Yarrabah, and Ray presented this petition in the Parliament. While working at getting the funding, Ray and Tom did some "scrub bashing" to beat a way through to Yarrabah. On one occasion they attempted to cross the Yarrabah Range in a Land Rover but got stuck in their truck and had to be winched out. Ray's determination eventually led to his success in securing the funding to get the people of Yarrabah the road they needed so badly.

Ray Jones' years in the Queensland Parliament were all served in Opposition. In 1974 Ray became the only Labor politician in Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn. While Labor seats around Cairns were falling like tenpins, Ray held on to the seat of Cairns because of his trustworthiness and because of his selfless and determined representation of all people. Many of these people were from well beyond the electorate of Cairns.

Ray was a feisty speaker in Parliament on a great range of issues including northern development, railways, roads, the port of Cairns, the sugar, timber and tourism industries and the need for health, education and housing infrastructure. In Parliament Ray achieved the position of Opposition Whip—a position, we know, of some considerable importance—and that of shadow Minister for Transport.

Former Deputy Premier Tom Burns talks of Ray with admiration and says that he would be forthright and persistent in pursuing matters of importance to his constituents or to Labor policy, though, Tom said, Ray was never a man to lobby on his own behalf. Nonetheless, as Tom Burns says, had democracy come to Queensland while Ray was a member he would have been a Minister in the Labor Government.

Despite the difficulties of serving an electorate so far from Brisbane, Ray Jones' years in the Parliament were full in his membership of committees and other organisations. He continued to be active in ALP affairs until the end of his life, though maintaining a position in the background after his retirement from Parliament in 1983. On his retirement, the Far North Queensland Youth Assistance Foundation established the Ray Jones Trust for Education Grants to honour and perpetuate his name. This was the first of many youth scholarships since established by the foundation.

Keith De Lacy succeeded Ray as the member for Cairns. He has given recognition to the importance to him of the standards set by Ray Jones—standards of integrity, hard work, service and commitment while at the same time maintaining friendliness and a willingness to listen and having in reserve a fierce determination to stand and fight when matters of importance arise. Ray Jones not only set a standard for Keith De Lacy to emulate, to which I also aspire; in fact, he set a standard that all in this Parliament would indeed be proud to achieve.

Ray's last official public appearance was in 1999 when Minister Robert Swarten opened a public boarding house in Cairns and named it in Ray's honour. Minister Steve Bredhauer has announced that he will rename the southern access road, one of our major roads, as Ray Jones Drive—a highly appropriate tribute, as Ray was instrumental in gaining the original funding for this alternative road access into the city.

On this day, in recognising the importance of Ray Jones' contribution to Cairns and to Queensland, it is right and proper that we also recognise Ray's greatest love—his family. He is survived by his wife, Fay; his children, Kay, Ron and Tim; and his grandchildren, of whom he was so proud—David Jones, Bevan Clarke, Tony Jones, Jason Jones, Ryan Clarke, Wesley Clarke, Gary Jones and Kiona Jones. He is survived by his sister, Nancy, and his older brother, Trevor, who is unfortunately unable to be with us today due to illness, and his younger brother, Allen. Allen and his wife, Marie, I am pleased to say, have joined us in the gallery today.

As Allen said to me shortly after Ray's death, "No matter the tremendous contribution that Ray has made to Cairns, beyond that I have lost my brother and my best friend." That is where this is a day of both celebration and sadness. For most of us present today it is a celebration of the best of politics. To serve for the best part of 19 years and to leave with one's reputation and integrity intact is indeed an achievement for any politician. To Ray's family, we all in this honourable House say thank you. We are indeed the better for his having shared his life with us, though we recognise that, of course, to the family, his presence and his love will continue to be sorely missed.

Ray Jones, in his maiden speech, thanked the electors of Cairns for the confidence and trust they had placed in him. Today we place on the public record that, indeed, the confidence and trust of the people of Cairns was proven to be well placed in Ray Jones. Ray Jones' funeral on 28 April was attended by over 400 mourners, amongst them many present and former city leaders. Ray Jones will be long and well remembered in his home, the City of Cairns.
