



Speech by

Hon. STEVE BREDHAUER

MEMBER FOR COOK

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mr H. Williams

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (10 a.m.): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a ministerial statement and, in so doing, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of the family of Harry Williams—his wife, Gail, his sons, Charles and Jon Paul, Gail's mum, his sister, Marion, and his brother-in-law, David.

Leave granted.

Mr BREDHAUER: This week, we have been saddened to lose a fine man who most honourable members on both sides of politics had the pleasure of being associated with. Harry Williams, my senior media adviser, passed away in the early hours of Tuesday morning. He was a respected and much-liked man who enjoyed a long and proud career with the ABC before joining my office in July 1998. On Monday morning, Harry was, as he usually was, full of life. He had just bought a new washing machine and was telling everyone in the office about his latest gadget. And when he walked into the office he was clutching a big cheese and bacon roll for breakfast, which he wandered around telling everybody they could share. He was ever generous, and in his element with people. Sadly, for most of our office that was our last image of Harry.

Those of us who met Harry through journalism, politics and the trade union movement know of his dedication to work, the long hours this work demands, and the attention to detail he honed in his extensive career with the ABC. Harry was born on 6 October 1946 in Brisbane. He started work as a copyholder with the Brisbane Truth newspaper before stints at the Nambour Chronicle, the Cairns Post and the Maryborough Chronicle. In 1970, he drove his iridescent purple Mini Minor to Rockhampton, where he started his long and illustrious career with the ABC before moving back to Brisbane, where he was a regular sight on our television screens until 1998.

As much as Harry was devoted to his family and his work, he was devoted to sharing with my staff his passions in life. This week has been difficult for my office, but we can manage to laugh at some of Harry's idiosyncrasies that will last with us forever. I will miss the almost daily early morning telephone call to fill me in on any transport issue in Queensland. He used to ring me even when there were none.

Many of us will miss Harry's obsession with Redcliffe, where his much-loved mother-in-law lived, and in particular the takeaway fish shop at Morgan's. Everyone in my office has been to Morgan's with Harry. Harry was one to share his special moments and favourite places with others. He had the ability to disarm strangers with his laid-back delivery. During his two and a half years of riding the lifts at Capital Hill I think Harry had probably met everyone who worked in the building. In the media and political circles, Harry was well regarded for his professionalism and level of industry. He was also a proud member of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance and chairman of the board of the Media Credit Union.

Let me also place on the record that Harry was one of the shrewdest Rugby League tipping brains going around. His beloved Broncos were the mainstay of his tipping. He won the inaugural Tang Trophy in my office for football tipping and he was pretty hard to shift for this year's title. He will be sorely missed by all of us. It will take some time to get used to the reality that Harry will not be cruising the corridors of my office with his daily greeting of "morning, comrade", or beating a path to my door to

check an abundant number of media releases by me. I will miss his great loyalty to me. Many of us will miss talking to him on the phone and hearing him say that he was "sober as a judge and working like a digger".

I knew Harry for only two and a half of his 54 years, but we packed a lot into that time. I have a couple of reminiscences to share, and I hope that everyone bears with me. One day we had left Maryborough West after opening a new railway station and we were heading for Century Zinc. As we arrived in Emerald to refuel the King Air, an old plane was taking off. As was mentioned in the newspaper yesterday, Harry had a passion for planes, and particularly vintage planes. As we landed, this plane circled around and landed again. It happened to be Lang Kidby, who was re-enacting the flight of Bert Hinkler in late 1998. Harry could not believe that this plane was coming back into Emerald Airport, in the electorate of the former Minister for Transport.

Lang's plane experienced a mechanical problem just after taking off and he had to return to Emerald Airport. No sooner had he landed than Harry was in his ear talking to him. Then I saw Harry on his mobile phone—almost a permanent state for Harry. Then I saw him hand the phone to Lang. He had rung the ABC in Brisbane and said, "Look, I've got a scoop for you. Lang Kidby has had a mechanical problem with his plane at Emerald Airport. Would you like to interview him?" You could take Harry out of the ABC, but you could not take the ABC out of Harry.

Harry loved Community Cabinets. In fact, he shared a passion for Community Cabinets that I suspect few on either side of the House share, except possibly the Premier. He thought they were great politics, but he also loved to be out amongst the people. That is what he really liked to do. He was always getting phone calls from Richard Cleal saying, "Community Cabinet is coming up next week. We are a bit light on for stories. Can you get something for us?" And we always did. In fact, a lot of the gallery at one stage were calling me the Minister for Community Cabinets, because we always had transport as a media story out of the Community Cabinet meetings. Unfortunately, that meant that I always got either no lunch or cold lunch, because my press conferences followed the Premier's and by the time I got to lunch it had all gone; the others had devoured it.

Mr Beattie: I had eaten most of it.

Mr BREDHAUER: Yes.

We used to run a few funny stories at the Community Cabinets from time to time. The tactics group—the brains trust in the Premier's office—used to think that we could use a few distractions from a couple of the issues bubbling along from time to time. In particular, I remember an instance in Roma. Honourable members on both sides might remember that there was a bit of a protest out there, with about a thousand farmers complaining about vegetation management or something like that. It was decided that we should run a story on the other side of town to try to distract media attention away from the main game. So we were launching a road project worth \$1.5m on the other side of Roma. I said to Harry, "You've got to be kidding me, haven't you? There are a thousand farmers protesting against vegetation management. Do you think they're going to come over here and listen to us talking about a \$1.5m road project?" Sure enough we were there with the Premier, and I think a lone reporter from the local newspaper wandered in about 20 minutes late and we gave her the press release. That was as much interest as we could muster.

Harry was always there in his big black hat looking like some kind of latter-day version of Zorro. He would do anything for a Community Cabinet meeting and to try to get a story up. We went to Kingaroy on one occasion for a Community Cabinet meeting—I suspect we are probably the only Labor Government that ever has. We were going to launch the Roads Implementation Program at Kingaroy, because we always tried to do that from one of our regional Community Cabinet meetings. Harry was so wedded to this that he decided he would drive to Kingaroy and help to set it up. Unfortunately, that was the day the Premier chose to have his second most famous meeting with former Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. While we were trying to launch the RIP, they were all in the room with Peter and Joh as they were shaking hands and getting ready for the lunch. Harry was railing against our bad luck on that occasion because we could not attract a crowd to the launch of our Roads Implementation Program.

Harry had limitless imagination when it came to the media. Dare I say it, he had even asked me to do things that would make the Premier blush. Unfortunately, things did not always go to plan. I remember when we opened the eastern duplication of the Logan Motorway last year the gimmick was that I would drive along the eastern end of the Logan Motorway duplication in a 1934 BB truck driven by Les Geyte. I promised Les that I would not tell this story, but under the circumstances I thought I would share it with the House and particularly with Harry's family. No sooner had we got out of sight of the media throng and the assembled crowd than the truck broke down. It broke down about eight times in the time that I was on it. I was cursing Harry for putting me in the back of this derelict old truck with Les Geyte. I had visions of having to push it past where the media was going to film the story. But we

did manage to get it going and keep it going long enough so that we could drive past the cameras and get our shot for the news that night. And then, of course, it broke down again.

Another one that did not quite go to plan was at Roma Street Railway Station where we were due to welcome the 100,000th passenger on the tilt train from Rockhampton. We went down there—and Harry thought this was a great story—but when we got there no media were present. He was kind of railing against the media on that occasion. He was saying, "This is a great story. Why don't they get out and cover it?" Unfortunately that was the day that the Americans had decided to bomb Kosovo. Notwithstanding that, Harry still thought it was a bit rough that they had not covered this really great local story.

This week we have lost an outstanding, generous and hardworking man, but Harry's greatest devotion was to his family—to his wife, Gail, and his two sons, Charles and Jon Paul. In fact, on Monday morning on the way to the meeting at which he took ill, Harry was talking to Paul Low, my senior policy adviser, about just how much he adored Gail.

I would like to thank the Premier's chief of staff, Rob Whiddon, and the advisers who attended to Harry at the Monday meeting. I would also like to thank the ambulance officers who arrived at the scene as well as the doctors, nurses and associated staff at the Wesley Hospital. I also thank the Premier, Peter Beattie, for taking the time to visit Gail, Charles and Jon Paul at the Wesley on Monday night. I can assure him that his thoughtfulness meant a great deal to the family.

This week my office has received hundreds of phone calls, emails, cards, flowers and other messages of sympathy from Ministers and their staff, Government and Opposition members, media and members of the business community. I thank them all for their kind thoughts.

On behalf of Gail and the family, I would like to invite Ministers' officers, Ministers' staff, honourable members from both sides and members of the press gallery and the media, particularly our friends from the ABC, to pay their last respects at Harry's funeral service at 11 a.m. tomorrow at St Stephen's Cathedral. People who worked with Harry from Queensland Transport, Main Roads and QR are also welcome to attend. The church service will be followed by a private burial service at Pinnaroo Lawn Cemetery at Bridgeman Downs. The service will also be followed by a celebration of Harry's life here at the Parliament House Strangers Dining Room. All of you are also welcome to attend. It will be a chance to farewell and remember a man who had a strong commitment to social justice issues, to indigenous Australians and to battlers. It will be a chance to say goodbye to a man with a great devotion to his family whom we all loved.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
