



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 16 October 2001

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Hon. W. A. M. Gunn, AM; Hon. Sir W. E. Knox, KTB, KStJ

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.46 a.m.): I join with the Premier in seconding this motion of condolence to the families of Bill Gunn and Sir William Knox. These were two truly great leaders, two truly great members of the Queensland parliament. How sad and incongruous it was that their funerals were held side by side, day by day.

Bill Gunn was born in Laidley in 1920. One of the remarkable things about Bill Gunn's life is that he was born in Laidley in the Lockyer district, he grew up in that area, he went to school in that area, he met his wife in that area, he represented the council in that area, he ran his farm in that area, he represented parliament in that area, he retired in that area and he died in that area. With the mobility of people and families these days it is not very often that we see that type of consistency, of someone spending almost their total life and undertaking their community work in one particular area.

Bill was married to Lorna in April 1957. Lorna, it is lovely to see you here in the parliament. We are all very proud of what Bill has achieved. It was lovely to see you and your family at that sad time. Bill and Lorna had two sons and three daughters: Dr Bill Gunn and his wife, Jennifer—Dr Bill spoke at the funeral and it was wonderful to see his son able to stand up and speak so generously and completely of his father as he did—Councillor Morrie Gunn; Dr Jennifer Ann Gunn and Phil Burr; Helen and William Bowie, who live in the Torres Strait and who are the reason for Bill's close attachment to the people of the Torres Strait; and Karen and Stephen Harper. They have 17 grandchildren.

As I said, Bill was born and bred in the area. He learnt to ride his pony in the area. As a child, he scrounged around for work in the area. He attended the Laidley North State School and the Lockyer District State High School. He worked as a clerk for a while in Gympie and then came back to Laidley to work as a farmer. He gave service during the war in the home service veterinary section. In the days before the formalities that surround the veterinary profession, Bill Gunn was renowned throughout the Lockyer Valley as their local vet. He was called out on many occasions to attend to people's horses, cattle and so forth. He was somewhat renowned in the district for what you might call his amateur veterinary status but also for his love and knowledge of animals.

He gave enormous service to his district. He was a councillor on the Laidley Shire Council from 1966 to 1970 and was chairman of that council from 1970 to 1973. He was chairman of the Laidley branch of the Country and National Party from 1968 to 1973 and was a delegate for the Lockyer branch from 1968 to 1972.

Bill Gunn became the member for Somerset in 1972 at the age of 52, which is a relatively late age to enter parliament, and gave 20 years of faithful service until he retired at the age of 72. During that time he was Acting Speaker, Temporary Chairman of Committees, a delegate to the Australian Constitution Convention and Chairman of the Local Government and Main Roads Committee. He was the Minister for Education, the Minister for Commerce and Industry, Deputy Premier and Minister Assisting the Treasurer. He also held the ministry of Water Resources and Maritime Services. He was then the Deputy Premier, Minister Assisting the Treasurer and Minister for Police. He also held a number of other portfolios during the interim Ahern ministry. He was Deputy Premier, Minister for Public Works, Main Roads and Expo and Minister for Police from December 1987 to 1989. He was Deputy Premier, Minister for Public Works, Housing and Main Roads from January 1989 to September 1989.

He was Deputy Premier, Minister for Finance and Local Government from September 1989 to December 1989. He had a very long, distinguished and responsible career.

Bill was renowned throughout the area for his farming activities. In the years I have been coming to parliament I always look as I drive past his farm on the side of the Warrego Highway. In recent years Bill has let his cows and calves out of the yard. In his old utility and with his old dogs, he patrols the cows and calves on the side of the Warrego Highway while they eat the grass. I do not know whether there is a fence, because there was a lot of long grass on the footpath and I could not see if there was a fence or not. But it always struck me that in these modern days he was the old shepherd, and it was something he loved. There was Bill in his ute with his two old dogs and every afternoon he would patrol around the cows and calves he let out.

As I said, Bill was totally someone of the Lockyer. He was renowned for his pets at his house. He also had a very close affiliation with the Torres Strait. He loved the people, and his daughter married into a Torres Strait family. He really loved the people. One of his favourite holidays was to go to the Torres Strait. It was just wonderful to see the people of the Torres Strait at the funeral who heaped accolades on Bill and who sang at the funeral. He was a very good member with an incredible local knowledge. He was very much a grassroots member for his area who was able to achieve so much, particularly the little things that mattered to people.

What Queensland will always remember Bill Gunn for in history is the fact that it was Bill Gunn who had the courage and the fortitude to make the decision that was right and correct to put in place the Fitzgerald inquiry. When I was at the funeral listening to his family talk about him, listening to his life history and listening to his friends and former staff speak about Bill, you could understand the quality of the man and why he made that very difficult decision. It must have been an incredibly tough decision for him to make, but he made the decision based on what he thought was right. The legacy of that decision is that in Queensland we have a Queensland Police Service that is undoubtedly the pride of Australia, and perhaps the pride of the world. It is highly regarded. We have a Police Service in which the police officers themselves have great pride in their service, in their colleagues and in their leadership. To a great extent, that is due to the courage that Bill Gunn had to make a very difficult decision, a decision that he thought was right and honourable.

That inquiry led to many other aspects of electoral reform and openness and accountability of government. Bill Gunn is no doubt responsible for all that happening in the first instance. In my mind, the thing we will always remember him for is the courage of that decision, the correctness of the decision and the legacy he gave to the Queensland Police Service, which is so important to us in this state. I join with the Premier in offering the sincere condolences of the opposition and this parliament to Lorna and her family in thanking Bill for a job well done, for the way that he cared for and loved his family so intensely, for the way he looked after the people in his local area, and for the sterling and honourable service that he gave the people of Queensland.

Sir William Knox was one of the great parliamentarians in the history of this parliament. I do not think many people would have given 32 years of continuous service and, in that time, undertaken the heavy responsibilities that he undertook in his various ministries and during his Deputy Premiership. He was born in Victoria in 1927, educated at the Melbourne High School and employed as a company secretary and manager. Sir William Knox had an enormous involvement in the community. He was a member of the National Executive of the Australian Junior Chamber of Commerce. He was a senator in Junior Chamber International. He was State President of the Father and Son Movement in 1965. He was Deputy Chairman of the Queensland Division of Australia Outward Bound since 1967. I think that gives some indication of the way in which he held family in such high regard.

In the northern suburbs of Nundah and Toombul, Sir William was patron of the Northern Suburbs Rugby League Club and Chairman of Norths Leagues Club. That reminds me that when I played for Eastern Suburbs we always regarded Bishop Park as 'Bash-up Park'. Those Northern Suburbs supporters were staunch supporters, and for many years he was patron of that club and chairman of the leagues club. He was Chairman of the Nundah Bowling Club, Chairman of the Nundah Kindergarten Association, past President of the Toombul Cricket Club and President of the Wongargo District Boy Scouts Association. Sir William had an enormous interest in education and was Chairman of the Independent Schools Association in 1993 and 1994 and did much for that association. He was knighted in 1979.

His political involvement commenced with the Young Liberal Party and he was State President of that party from 1953 to 1956 and became Vice-President of the Queensland Liberal Party from 1956 to 1957 and served for a number of years on the executive of the Queensland Liberal Party. He was elected as the member for Nundah on 3 August 1957 and served until 1989, a total of 32 continuous and loyal years of service to that area. During that period, he held some very important areas of responsibility. He was Minister for Transport, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Minister for Justice and Attorney-General and Minister for Transport, Minister for Justice and Attorney-General again, Leader of the Liberal Party from 1976 to 1978, Deputy Premier and Treasurer from 1976 to 1978, Treasurer from

October 1978 through to December 1978, Minister for Health from December 1978 to December 1980, Minister for Employment and Labour Relations, and Leader of the Liberal Party from 1983 to 1988. I think we would all agree that all of those portfolios were in very important and difficult portfolios which all had a heavy responsibility.

I did not know Sir William Knox; I was not in parliament in that time. But as someone outside of parliament watching it through the media and so forth, he always struck me as very much a real gentleman and elder statesman. I think we can all look at Sir William Knox as someone who gave a great example of how you hold a position in parliament and work on issues of policy and issues that are important to your electorate and play a straight bat and play it straight down the middle. He was a very firm Liberal leader. The fact that amongst the eminent speakers at his service was Sir James Killen, who gave a very eloquent accolade about what Sir William had achieved, speaks volumes for the esteem in which Sir William Knox is held.

Sir William Knox was very much a person of his electorate, a person who held enormous responsibility within state government, a senior statesman, a person whom we can all look up to and admire, a member of parliament who set a great standard for all of us here in this House and those to come. On behalf of the opposition and of the parliament, I offer to Alexia and her children and family every sincere condolence from this parliament.
