



Speech by

Dr Bruce Flegg

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard Tuesday, 28 November 2006

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: DEATH OF MR RG AKERS MP

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (9.45 am): On behalf of the Liberal Party and the coalition I rise to second the motion and to pass on to the family and friends of the late Rob Akers our sympathies and condolences. Robert George Akers was born in Brisbane on 17 October 1941—that is, during the war. His parents were James Henry Akers, who was a produce merchant and company director, and Mary Beatrice Farlow.

Rob was educated at Strathpine State School and the Brisbane Grammar School. He attended the University of Queensland and graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture. He found immediate work as an architect within the Department of Public Works with whom he had worked as a student while still at the UQ. Whilst he was working for the department he married his first wife, Ilse Frances Gaylard. They had two sons and one daughter. He left the department to work with Conrad, Gargett and Partners until 1970 when he set up his own architectural practice. From 1974 onwards he was a partner in Akers, Tan and Associates.

Rob took an interest in politics at an early age serving as a facility representative on the student union council at UQ. His first role in public life was as a councillor for the Pine Rivers shire to which he was elected in 1973. This is a position which he held until 1978. He also served as deputy chairman of the shire from 1976 to 1978.

Rob stood for the state seat of Pine Rivers and won comfortably in the 1974 electoral landslide in which the ALP was reduced to the cricket team of 11 MPs. Rob's first speech was an interesting one and I encourage members to take the time to read it. Three topics contained in the speech caught my eye. First was his criticism of the behaviour of all political parties, including his own party, the Liberal Party, since that 1974 election. He said—

These actions are not what Queensland voters asked for on December 7. These actions, together with those on both sides in Canberra, have brought Parliamentary Government to a low ebb in the public esteem.

Not only was this a brave thing to say—attacking one's own party in one's first speech is a bold way to start one's parliamentary career—but it underlined the character of the man. Parliamentary accountability and behaviour was of paramount importance. If that included attacking members of one's own government, then so be it.

Secondly, Rob bemoaned the absence of public facilities in the Pine Rivers area. Given the fact that Pine Rivers had the largest enrolment of any electorate in Queensland, it is a testament to his inexhaustible efforts as an MP and while serving on the Pine Rivers Shire Council that it has now has public amenities and facilities deserving of one of the fastest growing areas of Queensland.

Thirdly, Rob demonstrated a passion and depth of knowledge for his original profession, architecture, by examining public housing and more efficient ways to run the Department of Works, once again not being afraid to criticise his own government's approach to the area. In reading his first speech it is not surprising that Rob became a member of the so-called small 'l' group of Liberal Party MPs who over a period of years were not afraid to voice their disapproval of government policies or even vote against them.

One of the most well-known occasions of this independence was the crossing of the floor of 13 Liberal MPs over the demolition of the Bell Vue Hotel in April 1979. Rob Akers was one of those MPs who crossed the floor and, along with Rosemary Kyburz, the Liberal member for Salisbury, threatened in fact to become an Independent. I spoke to Rob's friend and former Liberal leader Terry White, who in expressing his sympathies reminded me that heritage issues such as the Bell Vue enjoyed nowhere near as much public popularity and support as those issues would today. This was a courageous position, and with Rob's background in architecture he had a passion for this sort of issue.

Two years later he married fellow rebel Rosemary Kyburz, which was the first time, as the Premier told us, that two current members of the Queensland parliament had married. They had two sons, both of whom were born while Rob and Rosemary were still in office. Rob was a firm supporter of the push to establish a Public Accounts Committee which was the catalyst that led Premier Bjelke-Petersen to call the 1983 state election. He and wife Rosemary were defeated at that election, but Rob did not sit idle for very long. He stood unsuccessfully for his old seat of Pine Rivers in 1986 and 1989 and in 1995 for the seat of Kurwongbah. Rob had more success back in his old stomping ground of local government, being re-elected as a councillor for Pine Rivers shire in 1985 and he served as shire chairman from that time until 1994. Rob was honoured by Pine Rivers shire, as the Premier has mentioned, with the naming of the Rob Akers Reserve after him and the receipt of the Centenary Medal.

Rob Akers gave outstanding service to his community, his state, this parliament and the Liberal Party. At his memorial service, which was held at the Lawnton Showground Lions Hall—a building that he in fact had designed as a student—his son Sean said of him in what I found to be a truly moving tribute—

Dad was the sort of character that seems to be getting a little thin on the ground lately—a gentleman in all senses of the word. He preferred to get his message across with intelligent conversation and quiet action rather than employing loud and flamboyant methods ... He was invariably helping somebody or devoting himself to some cause in need of assistance. I cannot but be humbled by the selfless dedication to these people, these causes and the Pine Rivers area. We are so proud of his legacy.

Rob Akers passed away on 22 October 2006 and is survived by his wife Rosemary and his sons Lachlan, Justin, Blakely and Sean and his daughter Jacqui and his four grandchildren Rebecca, Nicholas, Imogen and Tyler. I find condolence motions one of the very valuable things we do in this parliament because we remember people's contributions, putting aside the politics and the argy-bargy of the day. This is the first such debate that I have spoken in and it is for someone that I knew personally. Rob and I even contested a preselection at one stage against each other, in a very good spirit I might add. I think you could describe Bob as being an enigmatic person. He was an ideologue who found some of the compromise in politics difficult. It would be fair to say—and I am sure that he and his family would concur—that he was not much fussed with politicians. My colleagues in the Liberal Party, in the Liberal Party organisation and in the coalition join with the Premier in extending our heartfelt sympathy to Rosemary and to his family.