



Speech by

Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

CONDOLENCE MOTION: DEATH OF HON TJ BURNS AO

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (11.20 am): Down through the passage of time our short history has been marked by the significant contributions of many. Tom Burns is one of those. I remember when I first met Tom Burns here in early 1990 under the carriageway in front of the old building. He said to me, 'Young fellow, the one thing you want to remember in this place is to never forget your electorate. Work your electorate.' Those words still ring in my ears.

I say to Angela, the girls and the family, Tom was certainly a great man—a man who loved and respected you for who you are and for the contribution and the sacrifices that you made and who also loved the Labor Party. I think there is a message in that for both sides of the House. It is a message of loyalty, dedication and commitment to what we believe in, and Tom Burns demonstrated that.

Tom Burns is one of those fellows who was a true Australian in every sense of the word and he was a true Queenslander. We talk about liars, larrikins and legends. Tommy Burns fitted those categories to the full. He was not backward in feeding the drug into you, I will give you the mail. That was the liar part of him. We have all heard many stories here today about the larrikin part of Tom. The one thing I liked about the legend part of Tom Burns is that he stood up for what he believed in. He stood up for the small people and for the battlers who have been symbolised here in many speeches today. I think our history is better for the presence of Tom Burns not only in this parliament but also as a Queenslander and as an Australian.

The other thing that we can take from Tom Burns is his dedication to the people of the state and, as other speakers have said, his dedication to people in other parts of the world who are less fortunate than us. Tom championed the cause of many people who were less fortunate than us—people who have had fewer opportunities than we have had. Tom was always the champion for those people.

I remember years ago when on a visit to Barcaldine Patty Ogden said to me, 'Vaughan, Tommy's over there doing a bit of work at the centre.' I went over and I could not find him. I thought, 'I wonder where the hell he is.' He was in the drink. He was down in Burnsie's billabong. I do not know what he had on on the bottom half, but he had nothing on his top half. He was down the creek painting the bridge in Burnsie's billabong. That was the commitment that Tom had to the Workers Heritage Centre and the Labor Party cause.

I am proud that I represent that part of Queensland and I am proud that I represent this part of history. Last year the tree at Barcaldine was poisoned and we saw the removal of the tree for preservation last Sunday. The work that Tom Burns did in trying to restore that part of history certainly symbolises what we are as Australians and the cause in 1891 when the Labor Party was formed and the other bodies that were formed as a result.

I can still remember Tom's commitment to his wife, Angela. I remember many a time I would walk through the Strangers' Dining Room and see Angela and Tom sitting at a table in the corner having lunch or dinner together. He had taken time out of his busy schedule as a minister or a Deputy Premier for Angela. That is another part of the true character of a great man.

On behalf of the people of Gregory, I thank you, Tom Burns, for your commitment to those people. He was a champion for the people of the bush. He was the minister for the bush, as the Leader of the

Opposition rightfully said here today. I do not forget the things that Tom did. He was always accessible and he always had time for you. The part that I liked about Tom is that you knew that if he said yes he was going to deliver and you knew that if he said no he meant it. On behalf of my electorate, I thank Tom Burns for the good things that he did for us and for the things that he has done for the people of Queensland. I pay my respects to you, Angela, to the girls and the family. I hope the happy memories of Tom's life will be with you forever and a day.