




Speech By  
**Annastacia Palaszczuk**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

---

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: MR WG PREST**

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.33 am): The description ‘Labor Party stalwart’ is often used and, in the case of Bill Prest, is a well-deserved description of a humble, hardworking and caring man who gave everything to his family and community. William George Prest, or Bill, is a Labor stalwart in the truest sense of the term. He served as the Labor member for Port Curtis for 16 years, from 1976 to 1992. Prior to that he had a long and distinguished career in local government where he rose to become the mayor of Gladstone City Council.

Bill was born on 2 April 1926 in Longreach. His early life was touched by hardship, as was all too common in the 1920s. His mother passed away when he was only 12 months old and subsequently he and his siblings were raised by his mother’s sister and her husband. Of course times were difficult in the Depression years in rural Queensland and Bill had to leave school at 13 to support his family, as so many young men and women did at that time. He worked as a butcher, in the post office, as a grocer and finally as a shearer before he started working for the railways at the age of 21. He was transferred to work in various towns across Queensland before finally being sent to Gladstone, where he would meet his wife, Pat, the daughter of a publican. Bill and Pat were married in 1953—on election day—and a private function was held at Pat’s father’s pub so that it would not have to lose a day’s trading because of the election.

Bill was passionate about his local community from the very beginning. Once settled in Gladstone, he immersed himself in work for the local school P&C, helping to develop the oval and to plant new gardens in place of red dust and dirt. In 1970 he first stood for public office with the then Gladstone Town Council—21 candidates stood for six positions and Bill was elected sixth, beginning a dedicated career as an elected official that would last for 22 years.

Bill became deputy mayor in 1973 after being returned at the election as the highest polling alderman. Surely this was a sign of how quickly he had made his mark through his hard work and down-to-earth nature. In 1975 Bill was appointed mayor when the previous mayor resigned. Then, when Gladstone changed from a town to a city, he became the first mayor of the new Gladstone City Council. As mayor he oversaw the construction of new water infrastructure, sewerage, kerbing and the beautification of the city. All through this time he still worked at the railways doing split shifts around council meetings. For a man so dedicated to his family, juggling his work at the council and with Queensland Rail must have been very difficult. But higher office beckoned, and Bill contested a by-election for the seat of Port Curtis in 1976 after the death of the Labor sitting member, Marty Hanson.

Bill served many difficult years in opposition, and when the Goss government was elected in 1989 he became the government whip. Bill was an ideal whip. When he needed to be tough he was tough, but he also had a gentle side. My father served in parliament with Bill from 1984 to 1992. I know from stories my father Henry has told me just how entertaining Bill could be as a person but also how much he genuinely cared about others. When I asked Henry what were his enduring memories of

Bill, he said that behind the bluff and bluster there was a very kind-hearted man. As I said, he was the whip in the Goss government. According to Henry, he took the backbench under his wing as if they were his own family. When Judy Spence, who was a new backbencher at the time, gave birth to son Jack, Bill would ensure that she could leave parliament at a reasonable hour to be with him. This was even to the extent of taking her place in the chamber on roster himself.

He was very passionate about his electorate of Port Curtis and the community of Gladstone. He was an old-style Labor politician, following in the steps of men like Ben Chifley, who came to the parliament from a working life in the railways. The one thing that could be said of Bill—and I think that this would be the one thing all of us in the House would want people to say of us when we leave this place—was that you could always trust what he said. Bill loved his family, especially his kids and grandchildren. At his funeral his son, Darryl, and former member for Rockhampton, Robert Schwarten, both remarked that whenever Bill was with kids he would be able to produce a handful of lollies to keep them entertained.

Bill's long career in elected office shows just how well respected and known he was throughout his community. His service over many years in state parliament and in local government revealed a dedication and a desire to put others first and to make the Gladstone community, and Queensland as a whole, a better place. His is an example of what we should all aspire to. I would like to take this opportunity to pass on my condolences to Bill's family and friends, especially his wife, Pat; his three children, Darryl, Patricia and Elizabeth; his eight grandchildren; and his great-grandchild. My thoughts and prayers go out to them today.