



## Speech By **Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2017

### **MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: SIMPSON, MR GL**

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (2.21 pm): It is a privilege to speak in a condolence motion about someone who was not only a great member of parliament and community citizen but also my father, and he was a great father. Over the years people would say to me how dad must have been a terrific mentor. He was. Dad and my mum, Norma, who were married for 64 years, lived what they believed with regard to serving community and that we should all strive to leave our world a better place.

Politics was not a game. It was an arena to improve other people's lives by serving them with the best of our abilities and efforts. When my niece Hannah, their only granddaughter out of eight grandchildren, asked him to share his words of wisdom a few days before he passed away on 10 May this year, his reply was consistent with how he had lived throughout his 87, nearly 88, years. His voice was weak from the toll of his illness but his spirit was strong as he said: 'Serve others.'

I will talk about Gordon Simpson, the family man, more in a moment but first of his public service. During his time serving in parliament from 1974 to 1989, Gordon left a powerful legacy which still imprints the Sunshine Coast and Queensland today as the member for Cooroora in a seat that covered half the Sunshine Coast, from Teewah coloured sands on the Noosa North Shore south to the Maroochy River and from north of Imbil south to Montville on the Blackall Range.

Gordon Simpson was the man who instigated the historic abolition of death duties in Queensland and the removal of sandmining leases at Sunshine Beach, who protected Noosa Spit from development and who ensured Noosa's first town plan was implemented with a ban on high-rise. A passionate advocate for the environment, he also drove the expansion and protection of the region's national parks, particularly Noosa National Park.

As you have heard, he was a natural engineer. He resurveyed the Eumundi-Cooroy rail route. That was done firstly on foot before he put it on paper, and people along the route came out to greet him because the proposed route that until that point had been on the table had had such a devastating impact. He was able to resurvey that route and convince the government there was a better way, a lower cost, low-impact route which is in operation today, saving significant construction and ongoing operational costs and lessening the impact on people.

He was also among the very first to press for the Sunshine Coast having its own university, a project he first raised in his maiden speech in the Queensland parliament in 1975. He was responsible for Nambour Hospital becoming the coast's first proper base hospital and fighting for improved teaching hospital facilities. He actively fought for and achieved government investment in many more infrastructure projects such as the coast's first TAFE and many, many schools. He was also there at the start of the Sunshine Coast Helicopter Rescue Service, founded by the late Des Scanlan and Roy Thompson, with dad successfully securing the service's first government funding.

Always a passionate lover of AFL—so much so that is where he got his broken nose from—he and Len Daddow brought the first AFL demo matches to the Sunshine Coast in a push to establish and promote the game, and dad would later as an MP secure land for the code at Noosaville.

Sometimes in the fight for what was right he lost a bit of bark even with some of his own colleagues, such as the fight for fairness in the milk quota system where big interests cruelled the chances of the small guys and then the fight to stop Club Med taking land on the Noosa Spit. This earned him a rebuke at one point as 'that (blank, blank) greenie'. While at first Sir Joh was not supportive of Gordon's fight against Club Med, Gordon won him over and he came to agree with him, stating 'Simpson was right'.

The big win was the abolition of death duties in Queensland which paved the way for this cruel tax to be abolished in other states and federally. This tax hit grieving families hard, particularly those in capital intensive businesses such as farming, causing people to go into debt and greater financial and personal distress and forcing many to sell up and lose their livelihoods in order to pay the tax. In my mother's case, as a girl her grandfather died and then only 18 months later her father died leaving behind a widow and four young children with two lots of death duty taxes having to be paid on the same property within a short period of time whether the family had the money or not.

Gordon was the one who took the resolution to abolish death duties to the Queensland Nationals parliamentary party room meeting, as the *Courier-Mail* acknowledged on 11 March 1976. Dad had done his homework, as he knew what it would cost and what it would generate by increased business to the state. He won the support of the premier. A resolution was passed and then they announced it publicly in the media that day. It did ruffle some feathers, mainly those of the Liberal treasurer at the time, Gordon Chalk, as it was announced by Sir Joh ahead of the joint National-Liberal coalition party room meeting which met that afternoon, but the decision prevailed and the rest is history. As dad noted, Queensland became the place to be, people flocking here in their thousands as part of the great migration north. They were attracted by the go-ahead attitude, the belief in small business and in small taxes rather than big government.

A former wheat and sheep farmer in the rugged and semi-arid Victorian Mallee where his ancestors had pioneered, Gordon was always an innovator, looking for ways to improve things. He was born on 3 June 1929, the middle child of Hugh Leslie and Barbara Simpson in the Sea Lake Bush Hospital—the same hospital where I was also born much later. At age seven Gordon moved to Melbourne with his family due to the work of his father, HL Simpson, or Les as he was known. Les, a former Wycheeproof shire chairman and Australian and Victorian wheat growers president, was heavily involved in agripolitics and would also serve as Victorian president of the Country Party, so it is fair to say that for Gordon politics and public service were in his genes.

Gordon's family history through his father, Les, was also a great grounding for understanding that not all good ideas come from one side of politics and that capable people existed across the spectrum. Gordon saw his father, Les, appointed to a series of high-level government jobs by conservative and Labor premiers due to his practical farming experience and financial administrative expertise, culminating in his appointment as chair of Victoria's post World War II Soldier Settlement Commission by John Cain Snr, a program which succeeded unlike the tragedy of the World War I soldier settlement. Les was a returned World War I soldier.

After studying, Gordon went back to the land and, like his father, he also married a nurse. Dad met Norma Start at a dance while holidaying at Lorne where he was celebrating the end of harvest and his brother Ian was celebrating his graduation as an engineer. Norma issued an invitation at the dance to come and play tennis where she was staying which Dad took up the very next day, but then he found himself nervously standing outside trying to get the courage to go into the court. As destiny would have it, Mum hit a tennis ball over the fence and who would retrieve it but that young man whom Norma had met at the dance. They were married almost six months later, on 7 March 1953. Dad, who continued to play A-grade tennis well into his 30s, would later joke with Mum about their love match and also achieving their goal of a tennis team with four children, Bruce, Helen, Jock and me.

I mentioned earlier that Gordon was incredibly innovative and a natural engineer. He was a graduate of Scotch College Melbourne and Dookie Agricultural College, and he was made an honorary member of the Agricultural Engineering Society in Victoria, as has been mentioned, due to his most revolutionary tractor. The Farm King was no ordinary piece of machinery. It was a 200-horsepower, four-wheel-drive, fully articulated, powerful beast of a machine constructed using two US World War II Grant tank transmissions, capable of pulling three implements at once when other tractors of the time could only do a third of the work. It was quite a feat. Gordon was also made an honorary member of the Grassland Society for his introduction of a new seed industry.

At the end of 1968 and early 1969, the move north occurred. Looking for opportunities and to be closer to education for us kids, Gordon and Norma moved to Queensland's Sunshine Coast. He continued farming, undertaking dairy, beef and tropical seed production, before sugarcane farming at Yandina. He was also a part-time agricultural journalist, jointly contributing with his wife, Norma, to a

rural section for the *Nambour Chronicle*, one of the predecessor papers for the *Sunshine Coast Daily*. First at Cooroy and later at Yandina, Gordon and Norma immersed themselves in community service, as they had always done.

After the death of the sitting member for Cooroora, David Low, in 1974, Gordon made a momentous decision and decided to run for parliament as he was concerned about the direction in which Australia was heading. Out of 10 candidates fronting National Party preselection, including the then mayors of Noosa shire and also Maroochy shire, Gordon won, despite only being in Queensland for six years at a time when being born south of the border meant you were a Mexican. Because he and mum were already so immersed in the community—as scout and cub leaders in Cooroy, school P&Cs, sport and agricultural groups, the National Party, Rotary and writing for the local paper—he was as local as you could get. Next he had to win the state campaign, which he did with the help of family and wonderful volunteers. Mum wrote his press releases and hand delivered them to the newspapers, as this was the time before faxes let alone emails. My older siblings helped with doorknocking. I also remember when Dad travelled down the main street of Nambour on the back of an Army duck with a loudhailer, having to duck every time they got to overhead wires. It could have been a very short-lived campaign.

I was only nine years of age so my contribution was limited to handing out how-to-vote cards. However, I recall a funny story after the election where I was able to help Dad. Country members in those days were housed in the rather sadly dilapidated Bellevue Hotel. Dad had forgotten his key. The upstairs verandah doors of the Bellevue were nailed shut as there were no verandahs anymore, so the only way into the room was through the flapping breezeway window above the bedroom door. As a nine-year-old, I was shoved through that high window. I still do not remember how I landed the right way up but I got into the room and unlocked it for him.

History often records the efforts of those with the best PR team and not the servant leaders. Dad was a servant leader who cared for people. As well as the signature projects I mentioned earlier which have impacted our region, our state and the nation, there were ordinary but deeply important matters where he tirelessly helped local constituents. Over the years, I would often have people come up to me and tell me their very personal stories about how Dad had helped them. It is these testimonies that have been so humbling and so meaningful, such as getting public housing into Nambour. He found that there was no waiting list for the elderly who needed public housing. There was no waiting list because there was no public housing there. He got it fixed. He was fair and equitable and showed no favouritism. He worked so hard and genuinely for people, mostly in excess of 100 hours a week, and Mum backed him and worked alongside him. She was a wonderful life partner.

Dad briefly served in the ministry in the last turbulent weeks of the Bjelke-Petersen government, when party room numbers were being counted to unseat the Premier. Dad was loyal and did not believe in fairweather friendship. He supported the Joh Bjelke-Petersen government which he believed had built Queensland to be the leading economic state. Despite being threatened, Dad accepted a ministerial post. He knew it was a poisoned chalice but he did it for stability in the Queensland legislature. After retirement from parliament in 1989 after 15 years, Gordon did not retire from business, church and community involvement, continuing to serve and support many organisations until recent ill health restricted his activities soon after moving to Buderim in early 2016.

I have told you about his public legacy. Let me tell you about the family man and the person behind that public figure. He was the same man—a man who showed his love for others by what he did, not just words, and he did a lot. Even in the last few weeks of his life, he was in his workshop and big shed at the farm, when he was able to, helping prepare my huge sign trailer for the next state election then meticulously manoeuvring it out of its tight confines with a contraption he had adapted to a ride-on lawnmower—pure artistry in motion, Gordon style. I think it is fair to say that my brothers, Jock and Bruce, who were there to help, were amazed as Dad did this with extraordinary precision despite his incredible health challenges. In recent times, I gained more insights as to his extraordinary gift of creativity and innovation as I walked through his farm workshop while he pointed things out and explained his reasoning for why he had made things a certain way. I realised there were items which, on first glance, seemed simple or even without purpose, but they had a purpose because he had designed them, often through quite complex and considered thought.

For us, as a father he was loving, kind and incredibly generous. Sometimes too he was blunt, like the time he saw a date of my sister, Helen, at the door—a young man with a very bushy beard and wild head of hair. Dad looked outside and exclaimed loudly, ‘What’s that?’ I guess fathers are allowed to be protective. It is part of their job description.

For the past eight months of his life, he fought a fierce battle after being diagnosed with a rare neuroendocrine small-cell prostate cancer. My mother, Norma, and my family wish to express our sincere thanks for the excellent care of the Sunshine Coast’s Specialist Palliative Care Service and

Dr Louise Welch, Blue Care nurses, the Selangor Hospital, the Sunshine Coast Christian Health Centre, Dr John Reardon, Anglicare and many other fine doctors, nurses and healthcare workers. I also wish to thank the many people who supported us with their love and care, including people in this parliament across the political divides. We may have different political philosophies governing how we want to make our world a better place, but I genuinely believe we share that desire to do so, as did my father.

It may not be well known but he was the convener of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship for I think all of his 15 years in parliament. He cherished that table of fellowship, as it did not belong to any person, denomination or political alignment—just a shared belief in Jesus and the need for God's grace and wisdom, love and forgiveness.

There can be a great cynicism about modern politics, and opinions without action are cheap. Gordon was no armchair critic; he was a doer and a true community servant. Dad had a tremendous faith in Jesus. There is no doubt that, as he walked through this difficult season of ill health, his faith was not shaken by his illness but strengthened by the surety that his purpose, his being and his future home were in God's loving hands. He truly epitomised our state motto—bold but faithful. Thank you, Dad, for your bold and faithful life and for being an awesome and loving father. I am proud of your legacy, your courage and your commitment to caring for others.