



Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Edwards, Hon. Sir LR, AC

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (10.07 am): It is indeed an honour to stand in this House and contribute to the condolence motion for Sir Llew Edwards. I would like to acknowledge Lady Jane Edwards, who is here in the chamber today, and Sir Llew's sons, Mark and David, and the extended Edwards family who are here today with us. Of course I would also like to acknowledge my great mate the member for Bonney, Sam O'Connor.

It has been such a privilege meeting Sir Llew several times in my life. In fact, I would state that you could not go to high school in Ipswich and not know either Sir Llew or his legacy to that great town, and his imprint on Ipswich remains. Sir Llew was a champion for Ipswich.

As speakers before me have mentioned, Sir Llew's career started as an electrician. He had in fact matriculated to medicine, but his father, Roy, who had lived through hard times told Llew he had seen doctors during the Depression who could not find work, so he insisted Llew complete an electrical apprenticeship with the family company RT Edwards in Ipswich. Sir Llew apparently claimed he was never a very good electrician, and in his final year he had an accident which resulted in serious injuries and a four-month hospital stay, and that is where he met his first wife, Leone.

Far from near tragedy, he saw a new direction and decided to finally pursue his dream of studying medicine. While still working for RT Edwards on weekends and holidays, he graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of Queensland in 1965 and worked as a doctor in Ipswich until 1972.

It was in 1972 that he was asked to run for the Liberal Party for the seat of Ipswich. Sir Gordon Chalk, the then member for Lockyer, treasurer and leader of the Liberal Party, had visited Sir Llew's doctor's surgery to ask him to run. It was not an easy decision for Sir Llew, who loved being a doctor. He told Sir Chalk he would not have the time to campaign, but in the end he decided to run, winning the seat by just a few hundred votes. When he got to state parliament and saw what was going on it was reported he thought, 'How can I get out of this?'

Mr O'Connor: Nothing's changed.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Nothing has changed. There is a story that one of the members of parliament was found ill or had collapsed and Sir Llew was called upon, like all good doctors in this House, to look after that member. I think the other members around the member who was down said, 'Hang on, we haven't found someone else for that seat yet.' They were worried about the by-election. In any case, at the next election in 1974 Sir Llew won the seat by a large majority. As other members have stated, Sir Llew held positions in this House as minister for health, treasurer, deputy premier and leader of the Liberal Party. Sir Llew remained the member for Ipswich until October 1983, when he used his casting vote against himself in a challenge for the position of leader of the Liberal Party and he retired from politics.

It was not long before opportunity knocked again, and the then prime minister Bob Hawke rang to offer him the position of chairman and chief executive of World Expo 88. Apparently, Bob's words were, 'Mate, what are you doing with yourself now? Do you know anything about Expo? You're the only man in Australia who can work with Joh up there in Queensland. It's just a part-time job just a couple of days a week.' Sir Llew said he would think about it, but woke the next morning to read in the paper that the prime minister had announced him as the chair. Sir Llew became the face of World Expo 88, 'Mr Expo'—the event that is credited for making Brisbane and bringing more than 18 million people to this city. He helped transform 40 hectares of land in the heart of the city and he brought the whole world here to Brisbane.

For those in this House who are old enough to remember the brilliance that was Expo 88—and I do note that the member for Bonney was not even born—as it was my last year in high school, I was fortunate enough to have a season pass—I have still got that little laminated pass—and with my schoolmates, one of whom is sitting up here, Anne-Maree Savage, we were able to catch the train in almost every weekend. The world opened up before my eyes. I thank Sir Llew for the excuse that so many seniors of 1988 had as to why their exam results were not quite so stellar. The upside of this was that those seniors of 1988 were able to experience the tastes, sounds and visions of so many other countries—not just Germany—all without leaving Queensland.

Sir Llew also served as chancellor of the University of Queensland. He had a genuine interest and connection with the student population, and I hear he was often in trouble for taking too much time with individuals during graduation ceremonies. In all of these roles Sir Llew demonstrated his ability as a true leader. His niece, Anne-Maree Savage, interviewed Sir Llew whilst writing a book about the history of the family company, RT Edwards. She shared with me some insights into what Sir Llew thought was the secret to good leadership. These included: have good people around you; trust the people around you; expect the best but detect the worst; do not tolerate murmuring, debate or secrets behind your back; always be up-front; communicate; stay humble; work as a team; and make all feel important.

I was fortunate to get to know the Edwards family when I attended Ipswich Girls' Grammar and was in the same year as Anne-Maree. My brother Ross is a good schoolmate of Sir Llew's son Dave from Ipswich Boys Grammar. In fact, Sir Llew's extended family is firmly connected to my old school, with his sisters Gwyn and Merlyn attending, his daughter Louise, granddaughters Hannah, Gabrielle and Eloise—happy birthday, Eloise—nieces Anne-Maree and of course Sam's mum Suzanne all attending there. Anne-Maree said the entire family is immensely proud of Sir Llew and all that he achieved and contributed to Queensland and beyond.

One of Anne-Maree's earliest memories was handing out flyers supporting Uncle Llew at the local Raceview State School proudly wearing an 'Ipswich needs Llew' T-shirt. Anne-Maree also reflected that he always had awesome travel advice. He could recommend fantastic places to eat that only the locals knew about, and they were the ones he loved best. He would often share fascinating stories of his life. She recalls him telling the story of how he managed to get an audience with the Pope, which in itself was a challenge for a non-Catholic. The Vatican treasures were considered priceless and they had never before left Rome, but somehow Sir Llew convinced the Pope to allow them to come to Brisbane for Expo 88. He said that the next challenge was how to get those priceless treasures here. No-one wanted to carry them or insure them. He managed to get hold of the boss of Qantas, who chartered a private plane to get the treasures safely to Brisbane. He recounted the story with a smile, no airs or graces. He was always humble.

No-one could ever accuse Sir Llew of having a brush with the law; however, Anne-Maree had just returned to London from backpacking around Turkey and Egypt and thought it was a wonderful opportunity to send some of her loot and souvenirs home. She gave Sir Llew, who was in London at the time, a huge bag of stuff she had collected and asked him to take it home to Queensland. The next time Anne-Maree saw Sir Llew he said, 'You could have told me about the kebab skewers. I had a slight problem in customs. I probably should have declared them.' He had been detained with a set of 40-centimetre kebab skewers that were basically lethally sharp blades complete with belly dancers and Ali Baba on the top. Bear in mind this was just after September 11. Thank you, Anne-Maree, for providing with us an insight into Sir Llew and the man behind the public face.

Lady Jane, thank you for your service, thank you for your kindness to me, your advice and your guidance. The last time I saw Sir Llew he was with Lady Jane at the hairdressers—that was a couple of years ago—where Sir Llew would sit patiently reading the *Australian*. He would ask me about the state of Queensland politics and what was going on in this House. Sir Llew was a gentleman, always interested and always generous with his time.

To Lady Jane, to Sir Llew's sons David and Mark and to his extended family I offer my sincerest condolences. A humble servant of this state, a leader, a family man and a community champion, he truly was a Queensland Great. Rest in peace, Sir Llew.