



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Edwards, Hon. Sir LR, AC**

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (9.44 am): It is an honour to rise today to speak to the condolence motion for one of Queensland's greatest Liberals, Sir Llewellyn Roy Edwards AC. It is fitting to have this condolence motion in budget week given his many years of service as Queensland's treasurer and also as we see the installation of the Neville Bonner Bridge begin, opening up better access to his beloved South Bank.

To me he was my Uncle Llew, so it is a rare privilege to pay tribute to his life as a member of his family whilst serving in this place myself.

I want to acknowledge in the gallery Llew's wife, Lady Jane, and the members of our family who have come to remember Llew's service. I will probably forget someone and hear about it later, but we have his sons, Mark and David, Mark's wife, Gail, some of their kids—India, Elsie, Hannah and Eloise; and Eloise is turning 30 today so I wanted to rub that in and get that on record—his beloved great-grandson, two-year-old Hunter, who is being very quiet up there in the gallery and behaving himself, my Auntie Anne-Maree, my Uncle Gary, cousins Rob and Fiona, my mum, Suzanne, my dad, Rodney, my sister, Emily, and my grandfather Tom, Llew's brother.

For my grandpa, this is a particularly sad time because he is the last of his extraordinary siblings left. They were close. He and Llew are just a couple of years apart. They went to school together at Ipswich Grammar and worked together in the family business as sparkies. I believe in the dark old days before members were allowed to have electorate offices, Llew may have even been given a back room in the RT Edwards headquarters from which to work.

Thank you to all of my family for coming to this place today to where Llew dedicated over a decade of his life in service. That is what he did—he dedicated himself to the people of Queensland.

Llew was a legend of our Edwards family, an ever-present figure whose extraordinary legacy was something we all knew about and looked up to. It took me a long time to actually grasp the extent of the role he played.

We all got the stories of South Bank and Expo whenever we visited that part of Brisbane, but that was only the beginning of what he achieved. Even now in the weeks following his death, I am hearing more and more stories about which I had no idea.

Uncle Llew was a visionary who wanted to see the best outcomes for the people he represented in Ipswich and across our state. Llew had an incredible way with people. He was embracing of everyone. All people were the same to him and he would give his time and attention equally to them. Although anyone who met him would have noticed this charming style, underneath was a tough, determined man with strong convictions and principles.

I have asked members of our family why he chose to enter politics and, more importantly, why he chose the Liberal Party. With his background as a doctor, having delivered, we think, around 2,000 babies and tending to the illness and injuries of many more people, especially in the mines around Ipswich, Llew knew how underserved the Ipswich health system was.

My family has a proud Welsh background. They came to this country as coalminers, and that is what brought them to Ipswich and it means they were very left-leaning. His dad, Roy, my great-grandfather was a local alderman and deputy mayor. I only found out this week that he was actually elected as an Independent Labor member. That came as a bit of a shock because I have one of his how-to-vote cards displayed in my office. I probably should have read it more carefully before getting it mounted and framed.

Many of Llew's relatives were drawn to the left of politics because back then they saw it as essential to maintaining their rights at work as miners. Some were, in fact, openly Communist, including his grandfather, Benjamin Thomas. Llew even had a second cousin who would regularly run against him in elections as a Socialist candidate.

He believed his beloved Ipswich area was neglected. It had been poorly serviced and he wanted to fix that, so he ran for parliament.

Llew believed in the freedom of the individual. He wanted to do everything he could to make sure government helped those with aspiration to succeed.

Running for Ipswich as a Liberal was best described as brave. This was a strong Labor area. The local federal member was Bill Hayden, and when this seat was re-established in a redistribution, it was certain in everyone's minds to be a Labor electorate. In 1972, Llew won the seat of Ipswich against Kev Dwyer by 282 votes, a 1.2 per cent margin. Having won my first election with a similar margin of just 1.7 per cent, I can certainly understand his desire to not take for granted the opportunity he was given to serve in this place and to work as hard as he could as a local MP. It paid off and in 1974 he had a massive 17.9 per cent swing towards him. He turned a marginal seat with a high Labor vote into a safe Liberal seat because of his dedication to his community and the people he represented.

In my first speech, I included part of his own maiden speech, in which he said that we must 'legislate to provide an equal opportunity for all' to 'acquire the knowledge to enable him or her to improve his or her station in life and as a result benefit the community in general'.

He was a Liberal because he could not stand the thought of being bound to a faction or a particular way of voting. He wanted to represent his electorate to get the best outcomes. Even amongst his own side this approach did not always win him friends. There was often tremendous pressure on Llew from those he governed with.

Uncle Llew was known to go to everything he possibly could as a local member. He was rarely home. Even when he was working in Brisbane he would often travel back to Ipswich and go to community events at night. Saturdays were full of school fetes and sporting activities. He took it as his supreme duty and privilege to represent his area and he knew the Ipswich community deeply.

A few months after his election the devastating Box Flat mining disaster happened—a massive explosion which smashed windows kilometres away and tragically killed 17 people that night. He felt his house in Raceview shake and the mine's owner, John McQueen, lived just a few houses up from Llew. As a doctor who had worked around the mine for years, Llew knew what this explosion meant so he rushed to the mine and provided immediate medical care for the survivors. In those days miners would often take their sons down the shaft for the day at times, and sadly one family lost a father and a son. Llew had an uncle and other family members of ours die or be seriously injured in mining accidents so he understood the depth of this loss for his community. He kept in touch with the widows and families for years to come and offered whatever support he could. That was how he operated throughout his life.

His family knew that you would never be able to take a quick trip down the street with Llew because it would take an hour to get through one block with all the people he knew who would stop and have a chat with him. Even his wife Jane has experienced people calling the house decades after Llew had stopped practising medicine asking for medical advice from Dr Edwards. I think my grandpa may have tried this himself in recent years in an attempt to get his driver's licence back. By that point, I think Llew had been in Portofino for a couple of years himself. Thankfully, that was unsuccessful. He was the kind of doctor who, back when fathers were nowhere near the delivery suite, would drop past their workplace on the way home to let them know the news and then take them to the pub to celebrate.

I want to also pay tribute to Llew's two long-serving electorate office staff, Faye Thomas and Delma Boyd. We all know how important our staff are in helping us serve our communities and these two ladies did a wonderful job over many years.

What most Queenslanders would know Llew as is 'Mr Expo', and I am proudly wearing an original Expo 88 tie today in his honour. It is not a family heirloom; I got it off eBay for \$15. The Expo celebration was the birth of what we know as Brisbane today. It was as successful as it was unexpected. Many were opposed given the cost and the relative flops of previous Expos, but Llew saw what Expo could be. He, with his Welsh stubbornness, took on the challenge and delivered an event that all of Queensland is rightly proud of. His efforts to promote and organise Expo 88 involved making 5,200 speeches about the event, going on 35 trips overseas, 147 interstate trips and 31 intrastate trips to lock in participants and attending what is estimated to be around 11,600 meetings and deputations on behalf of Expo.

He also drove his vision for South Bank to remain a space for everyone to enjoy. South Bank was what some have called a cesspit of a site prior to Expo, with the best government offices facing the city rather than the river because of how bad it looked. Llew's office as deputy premier looked over the old site whereas Joh's on the other side enjoyed city views. That is partly what made him so aware of how much potential the southern bank of the Brisbane River had. Llew believed the spirit of Expo should shape the area and fought hard to keep the site for the people and have it protected as parklands as a legacy for generations to come. It is hard to think of what Brisbane would be like without South Bank. We will soon have the Neville Bonner Bridge connecting it with the CBD, and we can all be thankful for Llew's vision in driving it through.

Like my grandfather, for many years Llew was a teetotaler. He had not drunk a drop of alcohol. In my research for this speech, I found what I believe was the first time he might have experienced alcohol and that was probably on an official visit to Tokyo. He was given a century egg. This is a preserved egg where the egg white has turned green and the yolk is black—it is held underground for a century apparently, given the name—with a very strong flavour due to the hydrogen sulphide and ammonia. He was presented with this egg and had to eat it. If he did not it would cause great offence to his hosts. He gave it his best and after several attempts he managed to get most of it down. After that he needed something to wash it down with so he grabbed what he thought was a glass of water next to him. It turns out it was sake, which must have been quite an introduction for him.

Ipswich defined Llew in his character. Llew's proudest achievements include getting the much needed upgrade for the Ipswich Hospital, introducing school dental clinics and better maternity services. He backed Medibank, even though some saw it as the socialisation of health. Llew persuaded the then premier to accept the federal Whitlam government's significant Medibank funding and he used it to embark on a massive program of hospital building and upgrades. These were some of the services that drove him to run originally. He saw the inequity of health accessibility and he wanted to make it available for all.

He went toe to toe with Sir Joh on many occasions, most of which, I suspect, will never be publicly known. One of his wins was holding firm and refusing to budge on an 18-month argument with Joh to bring the fraudulent doctor Milan Brych to Queensland. He refused to register him as a doctor here and years later was proven to be entirely right.

Given everything he achieved, what he has nurtured in our family is admirable. He had Sundays at home, Leone making sure he kept strictly to that with the rest of his schedule so full. The family would head to his dad Roy's church, Raceview Congregational, with all the cousins and relatives and then Roy and Agnes would have everyone over for lunch to follow, showing amazing hospitality even though she was known as a terrible cook and it was not safe to eat anything unless it came from a tin.

There is another story involving that family house in Raceview which has become a bit of a family legend. Russ Hinze was visiting Llew and they were having a cup of tea on the back verandah. The surveyors' pegs were marked out for the new section of the Cunningham Highway. Russ noticed that they were not too far away from the back of the house and asked Llew if he would like to have this major piece of infrastructure moved further away to have less of an impact on the lovely Edwards family home. I am not sure how serious that offer was, but I am proud to say that Llew politely declined and the Cunningham Highway is just behind that area now.

Llew was known to only take one week off a year between Christmas and New Year. That was to holiday at Labrador on the Gold Coast, now in my electorate of Bonney. It is partially to Llew that I attribute my lifelong love of this part of the world to. In the 1950s, Llew and my grandpa Tom bought a beach house on Marine Parade. Since then, six generations of the Edwards family have holidayed there. They transported and donated the original house on the site to a missionary organisation at Tamborine and built a two-storey house called Deeside with separate units for each family. It became our second home. When I moved to the Gold Coast after finishing university there was nowhere else I wanted to live and I moved into a unit just a few hundred metres away from Deeside.

Every school holidays there would be around 20 cousins with a 15-year age range between them running around like crazy there. This chaos probably would explain why Llew only stayed there for one week a year. It was an incredibly special time which brought our extended family together and for that week he would be there playing cricket in the yard, fishing, getting to the beach and enjoying all the Gold Coast had to offer. I was not there when Llew was, but my memories of this place are what built my connection to Labrador and Biggera Waters and I am thankful for his and my papa's part in creating that space for us.

Llew has been lucky to have been deeply loved twice. Leone was his nurse in the Ipswich Hospital. He spent many months there after falling off a ladder while on a job as a sparky in the family business and breaking his back. Tragically, she died suddenly in 1988 of an asthma attack in the early hours of the morning. She was just 55 years of age. Her death traumatised Llew. With all of his kids having left the family home, he could not comprehend living there on his own. This was just six weeks before Expo was to open. Within a few days of her death he moved to an apartment in Brisbane. After more than half a century living in Ipswich, the place which had formulated his values, his character and his sense of community, Llew would never return. He found love again with Jane and their relationship was something he cherished and brought him many more decades of joy.

Llew achieved so many things in the years he lived in Brisbane and he was most proud of his role as chancellor of the University of Queensland. Like many of us who have lost family members, my biggest regret is not spending more time getting to know Llew and gaining from his wisdom and experience. I loved having him here for lunch with my papa a few years back just after I was elected. Even though his dementia had taken hold then, he loved being back and chatting to everyone as he made his way through the corridors again.

I brought him into this chamber for the first time since he left as a member in 1983 and he absolutely lit up with memories, excitedly pointing around the room. It was quite strange for me though because he was on that side of the chamber which is not something I have experienced. That is all he got to do, so he was very lucky.

I have valued the last few weeks spending time with my family remembering Llew and learning more about his extraordinary legacy. I would like to table this article as I think it shows Llew well. It is from the day after he lost the Liberal leadership holding his first grandchild proudly—my cousin Nick—clearly beaming with joy. It is the definition of leaving politics for family reasons.

*Tabled paper:* Article from the *Telegraph*, dated 31 August 1983, titled 'Grand first for Llew ...' [906](#).

Llew served our state with everything he had. I only hope that I can serve my electorate and Queensland with his same level of commitment and vision. It is an honour to be part of Llew's family, and I know we have all been touched by the number of people who have reached out during this time. On behalf of the Edwards family, I would like to conclude by saying thank you to all members for your contributions to this motion. Vale, Sir Llew.