




Speech By
Steve Minnikin

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Record of Proceedings, 2 September 2021

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Bonner, Mr NT

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (2.58 pm): I want to acknowledge a great Australian. I want to acknowledge one of my mentors. Fifty years ago last month, Neville Bonner was sworn in as a senator for Queensland and was the first Indigenous Australian to serve in the federal parliament. During his time as a senator, from 1971 to 1983, he was one of the leading advocates for Indigenous Australians and gave them a voice.

Neville was a proud Jagera man, born in 1922 under a palm tree on Ukerebagh Island on the Tweed River in New South Wales. Neville had only one year of formal education. He left school and worked as a labourer and farmhand in rural Queensland. The turning point in Neville's life came when he campaigned for the 'yes' vote at the 1967 referendum. This gave the Commonwealth the power to make laws in relation to Aboriginal Australians and to count Aboriginal Australians in the Census.

On 11 June 1971, Neville Bonner was chosen by the Queensland parliament to fill a casual vacancy in the Senate following the resignation of Annabelle Rankin. He had been preselected in third place on the Liberal Party's Senate ticket ahead of the 1970 Senate election. Ahead of the 1983 election, Neville was dropped to an unwinnable position on the Liberal Party's Senate ticket and resigned from the party.

In the early nineties when I was the Young Liberal president along with close friend Paul Scarr, now Senator Scarr, we invited Neville back inside the Liberal tent to address our Young Liberal state council meeting. In my 33 years membership of the Liberal/LNP, the speech Neville Bonner delivered that night was one of the most inspirational I have ever had the privilege of listening to. We encouraged Neville to rekindle his interests and get involved again and he consequently rejoined the Liberal Party in 1996 and was made a life member in 1998. Post politics, Neville was awarded an honorary doctorate by Griffith University in 1993 and he revealed much of his inner-driving force and vision for the country that he loved at the graduation ceremony. In what was truly a remarkable occasional address, the Indigenous elder statesman told his audience and the graduates that—

... dignity, courage, sensitivity, compassion, loyalty and responsibility ... are the ingredients for total maturity, no matter what race, colour or creed ...

...

My treasured sons and daughters of Australia, this beloved country of ours will flourish in harmony only when you view it through the knowledge that for an enthralling rhapsody to be played successfully on a piano, one has to play the white and black keys together.

There are good members on both sides of the chamber and next time members take guests on a tour of the parliamentary precinct please consider pausing near his magnificent bronze sculpture on level 5 and point out the fact that Neville Bonner was a proud Jagera man who, when pressed as to whom he really represented, would state that he represented all Queenslanders in the federal Senate regardless of their race, colour or creed.