




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Fouras, Hon. D, AM

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (9.41 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion for Demetrios 'Jim' Fouras. I met Jim initially two years ago during my campaign for this seat, which was formerly the seat of Ashgrove which Jim held from 1989 until his retirement from politics in 2006. My initial impression of Jim was this little old Greek guy who was just so incredibly energetic and enthusiastic and optimistic. He valued his relationship with his family, his neighbours, his community, his Greek community and his political allies and acquaintances. His ability to recall people's names, their lives and their stories was really quite remarkable. Jim was 81 when I met him and I feel like I should be saying that I wish I had of known him in his prime, but quite frankly Jim and his energy in his prime would have been absolutely terrifying if his energy in his 80s was anything to go by!

Jim was an integral part of my campaign. Apart from the former member for Cooper, Kate Jones, I would say that Jim was my most vocal advocate on the campaign. Following my endorsement, I went to coffee with Jim at a local cafe. It was supposed to be an hour tops meeting, but it probably took 30 minutes before we even managed to sit down because Jim knew everybody. He would walk around the cafe and stop at every table to have a chat and I learnt at that first engagement that there was no such thing as a quick meeting with Jim.

Jim was quoted as saying the most important considerations that people have when they go into the voting booth is who you are, what you have done and why you want to run. Jim took a real and genuine interest in these areas with me. He was particularly interested in my motivations for running and, by the end of our meeting, he had promised to come back out of retirement to campaign for me, and he did.

Of course now I realise that Jim was never really in retirement—he was always up to something—but he really took it on as his mission to have me elected. He hand wrote letters of support, he letterboxed, he came out with me at street stalls in the mornings. He attended every single day with me on pre-poll. He never fatigued. I actually wonder if there was a cohort of people who voted for me simply so that Jim would let them go and get on with the rest of their day. He was so persuasive. His ability to strike up a conversation with anyone of any age and to find a point of connection was unlike anything I have seen before and may never see again. Jim would talk often about love and that you had to love people to be in this role, and he was right. You cannot fake that stuff. He did love people, whether he agreed with them or not. He had an authentic care for others and their rights and interests.

As the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have outlined this morning, Jim has an impressive story. He was born in Kalavryta in Greece where he lived through the German invasion during the Second World War. We did not speak much about that time, but one story that he has shared is being in the bathroom when he witnessed his neighbour's house struck by an aerial bomb. His mother grabbed him, half naked, and the rest of the children and fled into the hills. When they returned later that day, Jim described how there was nothing left—no house, no people. The livestock had all perished.

I understand it was shortly after that that Jim's father directed that Jim and his older brother would migrate to Australia. Jim's mother did not want them to go. She allegedly tried everything to stop her husband, including trying to have him arrested, but in that place and in those times the husband made all the decisions and Jim and his brother accordingly migrated to Queensland in 1948 when Jim was just 10 years of age. I never asked Jim outright, but I am sure that this is where his care and empathy towards refugees originated—watching his mother and father make this impossible decision to send the children away so that they could be safe and to have a better life. It is the most selfless act that I can think of and I pray I never have to make it.

Like many migrants at the time, he did not speak a lot of English and it was imperative that he could get across the English language and then catch up to his peers academically. His determination saw him succeed through school and in his sporting endeavours and community service. He boarded at the Southport School for eight years and initially obtained a Bachelor of Science from the University of Queensland. His interest in politics, however, led him to return to UQ to study in the evenings to obtain a Bachelor of Economics.

History would demonstrate that politics was part of Jim's DNA. His father had a strong focus on collectivism and social justice, his brother became a parliamentarian in Greece, his sister a political journalist. Jim also accredited his uncle with helping to form some of his early and lasting socialist views. However, it was following the decimation of the Labor Party at the 1966 federal election that Jim decided to join the party. He and two friends walked into the ALP office the very next day and joined up. This was against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, which was a topic that Jim was very outspoken about. Jim believed that only a Labor government would speak up for the human rights of both our people and those needing foreign aid and decided in that context to become politically active.

Little did he know then that 11 years later he would be encouraged to run for and win the seat of South Brisbane—a seat well in the heart of the Greek community—which he held until 1986. Jim was proud of his Greek heritage and proud he was the first Greek elected into the Queensland parliament. He did share with me some of his experiences in Queensland at that time as a migrant such as the need to anglicise his name and the struggles with speaking his language. He shared one story about speaking Greek on a tram in Brisbane with an older gentleman and another fellow approached and told him to speak English. Jim responded by saying, 'I could. I'd speak it better than you I think, my friend.' He was never afraid of standing up for his culture. He has been quoted as speaking out against assimilation policies. 'Greek is more than souvlakis,' he would say. 'It's about our language.'

The need for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be culturally safe and to practise their cultural and spiritual beliefs was something really important to Jim. During his preselection Jim encountered his fair share of discrimination, with people telling him they would not vote for a migrant. Jim did not think he would be endorsed. However, his popularity gained through active campaigning and doorknocking made him a popular choice. He loved the old-school politicking and believed that doorknocking and getting out and having those personal conversations with people was the most important thing to focus on. He regularly told me the stories of his preselection and how that approach won him 50 per cent of the votes in a four-person race. He shared with me the importance of standing by your convictions and that not everyone will agree with your opinions but you still have to have one, and he would remind me that there are no votes in sitting on the fence.

In 1989 Jim campaigned for and won the seat of Ashgrove, which he held until he retired in 2006, and following his election was elected Speaker of the House—a position I know he was chuffed with and one he took seriously. I know, Mr Speaker, you will be elaborating on that this morning. In 2014 Jim became a member of the Order of Australia for his significant service to the parliament of Queensland as an advocate for homeless youth and social justice and to the community. This reflected both his successes as a parliamentarian and his efforts in the community. He was actively involved in community and sporting groups, holding board positions including a position on the State Service Superannuation Board and his work as a Human Rights Commissioner investigating homelessness in Australia.

I want to acknowledge Jim's loved ones who are here with us today—his wife, Tanya, and friends Deborah, Susan and Kerry. I know the remainder of his family who could not be here, including his stepdaughter Natasha and son-in-law David, are watching online. Jim was a great man. I heard him describe his dad as someone who could fill a room. I obviously did not meet Jim's father, but certainly Jim himself had that quality. You could feel Jim walk into the room; you could hear him too, hey Tanya? He certainly was not backwards in coming forwards.

He was a man who believed strongly in collectivism, in unionism; he was egalitarian and deeply passionate about the equal distribution of wealth in society. In fact, those who attended his funeral and wake would have watched a beautiful video that was shot shortly before Jim's death. In the video Jim

was interviewed for a school project by his young neighbour Will Glastonbury and in that video he reiterates the two future challenges for society is the distribution of wealth and climate change, which I think is spot on.

Jim was Mr Ashgrove and he is and will be missed by all of us. He spoke Greek very well—I did not hear him, but he told me he spoke it really well—and I do not, but I will say yassas, goodbye, and vale, Jim Fouras.