




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Ahern, Hon. MJ, AO

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (9.50 am): I, too, rise to address the condolence motion for the Hon. Mike Ahern AO, FTSE. It would be hard to get any more local to the Sunshine Coast hinterland than Michael John 'Mike' Ahern. The second selector in Maleny was a man by the name of Joseph McCarthy. Along with his wife, Marie, they selected 640 acres in 1879, and it was the only selection that crossed the Obi Obi Creek. They were Mike's great-grandparents. His grandfather was incredibly influential in the early history of Maleny. His father, John, or 'Jack', Ahern was born in 1904 at the family property, Connemara, in the Conondale district just down from Maleny. It was a farm that, I was told this morning, Mike loved to continue to visit even after it left family ownership. Jack Ahern sold pine, beech, cedar and hardwood from the property, including much of the timber used in the construction of the Hornibrook Highway bridge that linked Brisbane and the Redcliffe Peninsula in 1935.

I would like to share the following story about Mike's stepmother because it is Maleny folklore. I did forget to check with the family this morning. I hope it is accurate but, if not, it will continue to be Maleny folklore regardless. His stepmother was a lady by the name of Matron O'Laherty from the Maleny Hospital. She was a very righteous lady and never let anyone forget that she was the matron of the hospital. Mike's dad gave up driving; she took over. Over time, Mike's sisters realised she was not driving safely and suggested to Mike that he have a chat to her about giving up her licence. She was so angry with the then premier she told him, 'You might be Premier of Queensland, but you can't take my licence from me.' Mike replied that her driving was not safe and that he could. In turn she said, 'Well, you can't take it from me because I don't have one.' It is true. She was originally from Western Queensland and never had a licence that he could take away.

Ironically, Mike was born in Maleny Hospital and, as others have said, was educated at Conondale State School in the electorate of Glass House and at Downlands College in Toowoomba. He was elected as the member for Landsborough at the age of 25, following the retirement of former premier Frank Nicklin. It remains incredibly daunting that my part of the world has provided two incredible Queensland premiers, but I want to reassure the member for Broadwater that I have no such aspirations. Instead, I will faithfully serve so see him elected as the next Premier of this great state.

In his maiden speech, Mr Ahern also paid tribute to his late leader Mr Pizzey. I quote—

I am sure it was a source of regret to many of us that Mr. Pizzey had only one opportunity to lead his team in an election—the Landsborough by-election. I had the honour of representing his Government in that election. He won it well.

He won it very well, as we heard from the member for Caloundra.

Others will speak of Mr Ahern's time as premier and minister. I want to focus on his service as a local member. He began his representation of Landsborough by speaking at length about the economic opportunities and the challenges facing the agriculturalists on the Sunshine Coast. He never stopped representing the banana farmers, the pineapple farmers, the canegrowers and the graziers. But he was

also cognisant of the attractiveness of the Sunshine Coast and what growing numbers of tourists and residents would bring. I quote him again—

I represent in this House the key electorate of the Sunshine Coast of Queensland. This is one of Queensland's fastest-growing tourist areas. Projected growth figures indicate that in 10 years the Maroochy Shire will have a population increase equal to Nambour's present population—7,000 ...

The magnitude of the population growth on the Sunshine Coast may have changed, but the consequences have not. Mike continued—

This growth, although assured, will mean some special problems for the Sunshine Coast, firstly in the provision of school facilities, which will result in an increasing cost burden on this State Government in the future... As the tourist industry surges ahead we will need more policemen in the area to cater for the increasing number of tourists ...

Oh, those troublesome tourists! He got into a stoush with his Labor opponents in his maiden speech over the four-laning of the Bruce Highway, what with the more than 6,000 vehicles a day flowing between Beerburrum and Landsborough. It was desperately needed then and it continues to be now.

Because of this continuous advocacy and because he was such a gentleman, such a genuine and approachable man, he was dearly loved in our community. Desley Malone, our resident Maleny historian who helped me with this speech, shared that he was a huge help to her husband, Tom, in establishing Maleny's Committee of the Ageing and Maleny Meals on Wheels. Glass House Mountains pineapple farmer Ken Fullerton was chuffed that Mike agreed to become the first patron of the Beerwah Glass House Mountains Football Club, otherwise known as BeeGees, and he was even more chuffed that Mike returned for the 50th anniversary of the club and, despite the many years in between, still knew Ken by name. In his maiden speech, Mike said that Sir Frank Nicklin may have been 'too honest for the job of premier of this state'. I suspect Mr Ahern was foreshadowing his own legacy.

I had a lot of fun just now in meeting with Mr Ahern's family and, as someone else who has had children grow up with their father in politics, I asked what it was like being in and around this place and government. I got the usual stories about ghosts in the Annexe and how dreadful the family unit is to stay in, but I also had a laugh when his son, John, explained that he made the news for hacking into the ministerial computer system. He turned up at the Executive Building and saw a number written down above the modem and, at the age of 12, a couple of weeks later, decided to put it into his own modem and send his dad a message. Before he knew it, he was being interrogated as to how he had managed to achieve it and made it into the newspaper. Oh, the joys of being a child of a politician!

I pay my respects to his family in the gallery today. Your husband, father, brother, grandfather and friend was a great man. His footprints are all over the electorate I have the honour to represent. As the Leader of the Opposition said, this state owes a debt of gratitude to him and to you for sharing him with us. Rest in peace, Mike Ahern.