




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Record of Proceedings, 16 March 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Johnson, Mr VG, OAM

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games) (9.36 am): I move—

1. That this House desires to place on record its appreciation of the services rendered to this State by the late Vaughan Gregory Johnson OAM, a former member of the Parliament of Queensland and Minister of the State.
2. That Mr Speaker be requested to convey to the family of the deceased gentleman the above resolution, together with an expression of the sympathy and sorrow of the Members of the Parliament of Queensland, in the loss they have sustained.

I would like to acknowledge the presence today in the gallery of Vaughan's children—Monique Grant and her husband, Bill Grant; Tanya Johnson and her partner, Christopher; Michael Johnson and his wife, Ariel—his wife, Robin Johnson, and Vaughan's granddaughters Molly and Emma with her fiancé, Robbie.

In Buderim last month, hundreds of mourners from all over Queensland came to say goodbye to the man and the politician they all knew as VG, or simply Vaughan. Such was the outpouring of respect and affection for the former member for Gregory, people even stood three deep along the sides of the funeral chapel.

Vaughan always had an abiding, genuine concern for people's struggles and he had a fierce affection for Western Queensland. Above all, he had a great love for his family and they for him. That deep affection was so evident at his memorial service, presided over by his three children, whom he had always referred to as 'No. 1', 'No. 2' and 'Best Friend'. On behalf of all members here this morning, I welcome Monique, Tanya and Michael and their mother, Robin, and Vaughan's grandchildren who are with us here in the public gallery.

Before we list Vaughan's many achievements in public life, it is his hand-numbing handshake that anyone who has experienced it will never forget. Tanya, or daughter No. 2, summed it up best in her eulogy to her father. Tanya described his handshake as 'warm, sincere and bone-crushing'. 'Men all over the state,' Tanya said, 'will breathe a sigh of relief that they never have to brace themselves again.' She told mourners, 'While you can all now relax and stretch your fingers, spare a thought for St Peter and our Lord himself as they experience Dad's handshake for the first time.'

Vaughan Gregory Johnson OAM was born in Bourke, New South Wales on 20 July 1947. As a young child, he moved with his family to Queensland in 1952. He was educated at St Finbarr's convent in Quilpie and St John the Baptist convent and St Joseph's College, both in Hunters Hill in Sydney.

After his schooling, Vaughan worked as a grazier and contractor. In 1970 he was elected as a councillor on the Quilpie Shire Council. He served on the council until 1973. Vaughan also had a long involvement with the Quilpie hospital board, serving as a member of the board from 1980 to 1989 and

as the board's deputy chairman from 1983 to 1989. Vaughan's lifelong love of Rugby League as both a player and a supporter of the Canterbury Bankstown Bulldogs was also well known and he was heavily involved in the administration of the game in Western Queensland during the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1989, the then longstanding member for Gregory and National Party representative Bill Glasson decided to retire and Vaughan was selected by the National Party to contest the sprawling electorate of Gregory. Vaughan won the seat at the election held in December 1989. He then went on to serve as the member for Gregory until he decided to retire at the January 2015 state election, after having won eight further elections. During his 25 years in the House, Vaughan served in many parliamentary, political and executive government roles. There are too many to mention, but I know he enjoyed the role he played as Minister for Transport and Main Roads from February 1996 to June 1998 as part of the government led by Rob Borbidge. I note that Vaughan himself described that period as one of the great times of his life, and he was proud of the major initiatives in his portfolio that the government he was part of started, such as the building of the Pacific Motorway.

Throughout his time in this place and while in opposition, Vaughan served in the shadow ministry for many years, namely from 1992 to February 1996 and then again from July 1998 to November 2010. For the most part this was in the portfolios of transport and main roads but also at other times in the portfolios of police and corrective services, state development and small business, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy.

Speaking at the memorial service his only son, Michael, or 'Best Friend' as his dad referred to him, said that his father always held a special place in his heart for the men and women of the Queensland police 'force' as he always preferred to call them—so much so, Michael said, that, 'When he introduced speed cameras, which have contributed greatly to Queensland's coffers, we are certain, judging by the number of speeding infringement pictures of his own vehicle police sent him, Dad was their No. 1 sponsor.'

Following the 2001 state election, Vaughan was elected as Deputy Leader of the National Party and of the opposition and served in that role from March 2001 to February 2003. When the government led by Campbell Newman came to office in 2012, Vaughan was appointed as Chief Government Whip, and he continued in that position until his retirement in January 2015. Throughout his time in this House, Vaughan also served on various parliamentary committees. His eldest daughter, Monique, has said her dad took great pride in having little or no LNP paraphernalia in his office. When people asked why, he would tell them he was voted in by the people and for the people. He was there for everyone and his love for the bush and for the people of Western Queensland needed no introduction.

Sadly, throughout his life Vaughan could never overcome his great fear of flying. As his children tell it, there are probably still planes in the air that have the imprints of their father's fingers in the overhead lockers and arm rests. If he needed a charter flight, there was only one pilot for the job and that was Johnny Mac and his two-engine aircraft. In their dad's mind, there was always a backup engine if one failed. As a final failsafe, there in the glove box of the plane Johnny Mac always carried a whistle, a party hat and a bottle of Bundy rum.

Following his retirement from the parliament, it was my pleasure in 2015 to proudly appoint Vaughan as a Wild Dog Advisory Council commissioner. Vaughan played an absolutely critical listening and representative role in this position. He was a fierce advocate for my government's cluster fencing initiative, which had a role in revitalising the sheep and wool industry in Western Queensland.

There was many a time when Vaughan joined the fencing contractors to ensure they were carrying out their contracts absolutely to the letter. I fondly recall inspecting the great progress on this cluster fencing with Vaughan and Minister Furner in Barcaldine in 2017. I also had the pleasure in 2018 of appointing Vaughan as a Queensland Drought Commissioner, through which he actively ensured my government was always very well informed of drought conditions and the assistance producers very much needed.

In 2020, Vaughan was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List for service to the people and the parliament of this state. This was a very fitting tribute to Vaughan for his length of dedicated service to the people of Queensland, and his family and friends have every reason to be enormously proud of his life.

When Monique sadly discovered that her father had passed away peacefully in the night after celebrating Chinese New Year at a lovely family dinner gathering, she was in no doubt he would be waiting already in heaven's 'Strangers Bar', where of course there would be no strangers to Vaughan Johnson.

I do not think it would be a stretch at all to say that Vaughan Johnson would have to have been one of the most popular members across all sides of politics to ever serve in this place. I am certain that he will be forever fondly remembered by the members who served with him during those times and also by the staff who worked here. Whether people lived in Birdsville, Bamaga or Brisbane, Vaughan was a down-to-earth, no-nonsense politician absolutely committed to helping people. He was a passionate man, a mate to everyone and an absolutely fierce advocate for regional Queensland.

Vaughan Gregory Johnson OAM passed away on 22 January aged 75 years, and a beautiful funeral service was held to celebrate his life in Buderim on 2 February. It was an honour to have been in attendance on that day along with some of my ministerial colleagues and members of parliament including those from the opposite side. Amongst the many moving words in the Memorial Ode Ben Johnson composed in tribute to his father were these—

I see you now, as I always have,
Your humble nature, with respect for self,
And all that surround you.
With humility you went about your days,
Ever friendly, ever kind,
And always so generous.

I place on record the government's thanks for the years of service Vaughan gave to the institutions of our democracy and to the Queensland community. On behalf of the government, I take this opportunity to extend my sympathy and that of this House to Vaughan's family and his many friends across Queensland.