




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Gordon, Mr WJ

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (9.44 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion, as moved by the Premier, in relation to the former member for Cook William John Gordon. In doing so, I wish to formally acknowledge the life and service of Billy Gordon. Born in Innisfail, Billy Gordon was a Bar Barrum man from the western Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland. He was proudly a Far North Queenslander all of his life. As has been recognised and acknowledged, Billy Gordon was an important voice for First Nations peoples, not only in the Queensland parliament, but indeed prior to his election and throughout his post-parliamentary career. I particularly acknowledge and highlight Billy Gordon's former service with the 51st Battalion in Cairns, an Australian Army Reserve battalion which Billy Gordon proudly noted consisted of approximately 30 per cent of persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

In relation to Billy Gordon's service as an elected representative, I know that prior to being elected to the Queensland parliament Billy Gordon first ran for the federal seat of Leichhardt in 2013 against the then successful Liberal candidate Warren Entsch. Just two years later Billy Gordon ran for the state seat of Cook and, together with many serving elected representatives on both sides of the House, entered this House as a part of the 55th Queensland parliament. Billy Gordon served for a term as the elected representative for the state seat of Cook, initially as the Australian Labor Party representative until 30 March 2015 and then serving the remainder of his term as an Independent.

Whilst various and complex issues were well canvassed at the time as to his departure from the Australian Labor Party, Billy Gordon made it clear that he was determined to honour his commitment to his constituents in fully serving out his elected term. In doing so, he honoured his commitment to his constituency. Notwithstanding political party differences, I and all members of the Queensland parliament acknowledge Billy Gordon's commitment and advocacy as an elected representative who fought and advocated on the issues that were important to his constituents—issues that included youth unemployment in regional Far North Queensland; the need for major infrastructure project delivery; and, as he called it, the 'unacceptable cost of living pressures' that these communities face.

Billy and I had a number of conversations about various health and specialist outreach services in many communities within Cape York and Far North Queensland. Billy made overtures to me in my previous roles as a former president of the Rural Doctors Association and the Australian Medical Association. He made those overtures to discuss specialist medical outreach services, particularly as they relate to renal dialysis, chronic heart disease, as well as multidisciplinary services to deal with other health conditions such as diabetes and obesity. He had a real passion and commitment about understanding the health needs of his communities and of First Nations Queenslanders. The insightful conversations that we had certainly indicated to me, as a fellow parliamentarian, his advocacy and dedication to closing the gap, particularly with respect to health initiatives, and achieving real and meaningful improvements for First Nations Australians. Billy had an appreciation of the risks of existing

and emerging infectious diseases and some of the shared issues that exist between Far North Queensland communities, islands in the Torres Strait and some of our closest neighbours such as Papua New Guinea.

In reflecting on his achievements on the eve of the 2017 state election, Bill Gordon stated that he was 'extremely proud' of a number of issues he had championed, including the following as reported by the *Guardian*—

... fighting for cane farmers' greater say in selling their sugarcane, for greater community control of primary health care in Cape York and his support for the agricultural industry by opposing the tree clearing ban.

I am not a religious person but there is something I find deeply confronting about death—it is probably the finality of it—but we celebrate life and the extraordinary individuality of it. I place on record my formal condolences to Billy Gordon's partner, to his family in the gallery, his friends and his community. Vale, Billy Gordon.