




Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Gordon, Mr WJ

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.10 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion. In 2013 I met Billy for the first time. As we have heard, he had nominated to run in the seat of Leichhardt. Back then I had tickets on myself and I thought that maybe I could do it too. I was quickly sat down by the Labor Party and told, 'No, we have a candidate and his name is Billy Gordon.' I went and found him and we became good mates. I helped him on that 2013 campaign. He was unsuccessful, but almost instantly he was preselected by Labor for the seat of Cook. Mr Speaker, as members would know, you, Rob Pyne, Billy and I went to that election as the Far North Queensland team. To this day I am interested to know whether I am the only member who has lost both of my neighbouring members of parliament from the party to the crossbench, but I can assure the House that it was not me.

Billy and I were good mates and we stayed good mates. As has been mentioned by many speakers, Billy had a huge task during that 55th Parliament when he went to the crossbench. Members who were here would know that there were lots of divisions and, as the member for Clayfield has said, some of those happened at 3 am and at other times. Billy controlled the balance of power on many of those votes. There was a huge load on him. As I am sure members of our current crossbench know, sometimes you can be in a meeting when the bells ring and you turn up in the House with no idea what the House has divided over. Suddenly you have a clipboard in front of you and you are asked to vote 'yes' or 'no'.

I was given a bit of task back in those days. Some of my colleagues on this side called me the 'Billy Whisperer'. It was my role to know where Billy was and to make sure that he got to the chamber and knew which way to vote. Billy sat up the back and I sat halfway along the chamber. Sometimes he would send me a text message saying, 'Brother, which way am I voting, yes or no? Sometimes I would say, 'I don't know. I've just got here myself.' On a couple of occasions I said, 'You're voting no. You should vote no. But then I would say, 'No, hang on! You're voting yes.' I do not think I was responsible for that vote that the member for Clayfield spoke about. I am pretty sure I was not responsible for that, but I think there were a couple of close calls.

I do recall when one of Anthony Lynham's bills, I think it was, was being debated very late at night. Billy wanted to go upstairs. Of course, back then we were told very strongly by our whips that we were not allowed to be above about the 6th level, or something like that, but Billy wanted to go upstairs. I received permission to go with him because we needed to know where he was as a division was imminent. We went up to the special room on level 22 where people liked to congregate. I was up there having a couple of quiet ales with Billy. He said, 'I'm going to the toilet. I'll be back in a sec.' He never came back. I think he went to bed. Suddenly, I was getting texts from the whips saying, 'Things are getting close.' I was bashing on Billy's door but he did not answer. I had to say, 'I've actually lost him. I

can't find him. I don't know where he is.' Members may recall that night because suddenly, right at the last minute, the government changed the bill; we started debating the next bill. I did manage to find Billy a bit later on.

A few members have talked about the Minjerribah sand mining bill. The previous member for Stretton and I were part of the parliamentary committee that looked into that bill. We had a lot of consultation with Billy. He was very keen on that piece of legislation. He was very supportive of Minjerribah and that mining bill. I think that is one of his big legacies in this place.

The member for Algeester talked about phones. While she did that I quickly went into my phone and searched for 'Billy Gordon'. I can find six telephone numbers for Billy Gordon. There is 'Billy Gordon', 'Billy Gordon 2', 'Billy G', 'Billy Gordon newest', 'Billy Gordon private' and 'Billy Gordon private new'. I think he had more burner phones than in a Jason Bourne movie.

When we first came into this place and while they were still trying to sort out the accommodation, Billy was assigned the family apartment on level 3. On the first night in parliament, the member for Thuringowa and myself were down there. We were all getting to know new people and were having a bit of a yarn with Billy. There were sandwiches in the fridge. We were all hungry so we thought, 'Well, they must be for us.' I think there was a school group the next day that did not get their sandwiches. Billy always referred to it as 'sandwich-gate'. We would always have a good yarn about that. I received many representations from the GAP. There were a lot of jokes about the Gordon Australia Party.

In all seriousness, Billy was a good mate of mine. I miss him dearly. I went to his funeral with the members for Hill, Toohey and Cook. My condolences go to his family and friends.