



Speech By  
**Cynthia Lui**


**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

## **MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Gordon, Mr WJ**

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (10.26 am): I rise to make my contribution to this condolence motion. I would like to extend my condolences to the extended family and friends of the former member for Cook, the late William John 'Billy' Gordon who passed away suddenly last November. I acknowledge Billy's partner Olympia, his sister Megan and also Billy's niece Olivia. Billy is a Bar Barrum man from the western Atherton tablelands in Far North Queensland. Billy was born in Innisfail, with family ties to Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Billy is a Far North Queensland through and through.

During his maiden speech he spoke about his life experiences that shaped him—from having blistered hands and an aching back from swinging a cane knife to serving as a member of the 51st Battalion in the Far North Queensland Regiment. He was a builder's labourer, social worker, cleaner and a public servant. I never had the opportunity to work with Billy and my own personal interactions with him were fleeting. Even though I did not know Billy personally, I feel like I have gotten to know Billy through my good friend, the former member for Stretton the late Mr Duncan Pegg, who wished more than anything for Billy and me to be friends for the obvious reason—he thought it would be cool to be friends with the former and current member for Cook!

Duncan described Billy as being kind, genuine and passionate with a great sense of humour. Duncan questioned my dry sense of humour, because it was nothing compared to Billy. It was Duncan who finally introduced us for the first time on the day he resigned from parliament. Billy was in the chamber to show support for Duncan. It was not the best of days after Duncan's resignation speech to parliament, but I could see how pleased Duncan was when he finally introduced the former and the current member for Cook in the corridors of parliament. That day I saw compassion. Duncan and Billy met in parliament and, even after Billy exited this place, they remained good friends. It did not surprise me one bit that Billy was in the chamber to support a dear friend in need.

Billy was my direct predecessor in this place. As well as a former member of parliament, Billy was a son, brother, father, uncle, partner and a friend to those closest to him. I was moved when I heard the news late last year and saddened mostly to hear of a life cut so short. Billy was elected into the Queensland parliament in 2015 and became one of two First Nations members of parliament elected. The other was the honourable Leanne Enoch. Following in the footsteps of the late Mr Eric Deeral, Billy made history by becoming one of three First Nations MPs ever elected to the Queensland parliament and the second First Nations person to be elected to represent the Cook electorate.

In the history of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have the lowest representation in this House. The late Mr Eric Deeral was the first Aboriginal man elected to state parliament and Billy followed in his legacy. I remember back in 2015 how overjoyed I felt when news broke of his successful bid to represent the great electorate of Cook. When one

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person breaks the glass ceiling it is an achievement for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Billy's successful election victory was celebrated by all and Billy made history.

Billy was born into a humble working-class family and denied opportunities that most in this country take for granted, but he managed to grasp his own destiny and stride onto the floor of parliament. It is an extraordinary achievement that no-one can take from him.

By his own measure, Billy was an improbable politician. Billy's tenure as a Labor MP was shorter than anyone could have predicted, but Billy never swayed from his Labor values. He strongly believed in Labor visions of social justice, the rights of workers, the environment and, of course, the rights and interests of First Nations people. He held a burning conviction that a hard day's work should be rewarded with a fair day's pay, and he knew firsthand what it means to be working class in this country. He stood up for the people of Cook.

Billy felt strongly about the Labor agenda and continued to show support for a Labor government. He voted in favour of many important reforms. He also remained a persistent and hardworking force as a campaigner and he did a lot of this work behind the scenes. Billy was a proud advocate and a man whose short life was full of achievement.

Sadly, I attended Billy's funeral in Mareeba in December last year, along with the member for Barron River, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Craig Crawford MP, and the member for Toohey, Peter Russo MP. All those who spoke at his funeral radiated genuine warmth, undeniable fondness and affection, reminiscing on their connection to Billy. It was obvious that he was a man of great humour and energy and was dearly loved by those who knew him best. May he rest in peace. Vale, Billy.