




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Ahern, Hon. MJ, AO

 **Mr CRISAFULLI** (Broadwater—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.38 am): On 2 December 1987 then Queensland premier Mike Ahern sought and received the confidence of the Queensland parliament in his recently appointed government. During that debate he set out his objectives as premier and described how he saw himself and the government he led. He said—

I have always regarded myself as a parliamentarian first and a politician second.

He revealed his plans to make this a reality for the entire parliament, and again I will quote from that speech. He said—

It has been a long, hard, often frustrating struggle to restore the dignity, the power and the influence that this Parliament deserves as of right, and even today much work has yet to be done to elevate this House to its proper standing in the affairs of State. I give an unequivocal assurance that an Ahern Government will move with determination and all possible speed to achieve that elevation and to ensure that the parliamentary institution is held in the highest-possible public regard.

No words could better describe what Mike Ahern sought to achieve in his 22 years in this House. Whatever his innovative solutions to policy challenges, it will be as a champion of this parliament and of integrity in government that he will be remembered. Central to his commitment to service was his passionate belief that the interests of the people always took precedence over the demands of politics. Mike Ahern put people before politics. It was this belief that inspired his public life and formed the basis of his commitment to the wellbeing of others.

Mike Ahern was a son of the Sunshine Coast. The lessons he learned growing up in that part of Queensland stayed with him for his entire life and they pointed to the value he placed on community, belief and family. Educated at Conondale school, Downlands College and the University of Queensland, where he graduated with a degree in agricultural science, Mike Ahern was drawn to politics and the then Country Party. As the Premier said, under the influence of two of his mentors, Mike Ahern was drawn towards a political career. It was in organisational politics that he first made his mark—as state president of the Young Country Party, federal president of the Young Country Party and junior vice-president of the Country Party in Queensland.

Nicklin's retirement from state parliament after nearly 36 years and after nearly 11 years as premier gave Mike Ahern the opportunity to embark on a parliamentary career. The tumultuous Landsborough by-election of March 1968 saw Mike Ahern take his place on the government benches and commence a career of service and commitment to others. Paul Reynolds, in his biography of Mike Ahern *Lock, Stock & Barrel*, pointed to the enigmatic nature of Ahern's entry into parliamentary politics. His youth, education and religious persuasion set him apart from many of his colleagues in the Queensland parliament of the late 1960s. It was in his early days in parliament that Mike Ahern gave

voice to those forces that drove his public life. It was a desire to assist others in achieving their goals that motivated him. In his address-in-reply speech in August 1968 he said—

We will seek new solutions to the problems that confront our industries and our people with only one criterion in mind, namely, what is best for the greatest number of people in the State of Queensland.

It was not until 1980—12 years after his election—that Mike Ahern first achieved ministerial rank. He successively held the portfolios of primary industries; industry, small business and technology; and health and environment. However, in the preceding decade he had served as government whip and contributed through membership of two significant select committees—punishment of crimes of violence, and education. It was as a member of these committees that he gave voice to his belief in the importance of this place as a vehicle for social change. To him, parliament was a dynamic institution which had a key role to play in improving conditions within the community. By harnessing its expertise, goodwill and diligence, parliament could make a genuine difference to so many people.

When Mike Ahern became premier in 1987, he embarked on a course designed to change Queensland, restore the fortunes of the then National Party and restore the institutions which he regarded as vital to the state's progress. It was a difficult challenge but one he accepted with a combination of quiet determination, vigorous endeavour and optimism. While his premiership was relatively short, it was marked by a genuine attempt to initiate change and create opportunities for all Queenslanders. That he championed the changes that needed to be made will forever be to his credit. Central to his commitment to his fellow Queenslanders was his belief in the political process and the capacity for practical politics to promote improvements in society. To him, political parties were vehicles for change in which the collective will and commitment could achieve so much.

When I was privileged to be asked to speak at Mike Ahern's funeral, I was told by his daughter Louise of her father's enthusiasm for meetings with the party membership, both during and after his time in this House. As she recalled, the party nourished him. He loved them and they loved him. Upon his retirement from parliament in 1990, Mike's contribution to the wider community did not cease. He established a successful career in business and philanthropy and continued his lifelong ambition of helping others.

Queensland is the poorer for Mike Ahern's passing. This parliament and the entire state owe him a debt of gratitude. He showed us the importance of change, the importance of decency in public life and the value of putting the interests of others over self-interest. To his wife, Andrea; their children, Louise, Claire, John, Christine and Sharon; and their families who join us today, we offer our sincere condolences and welcome you to this House. Mike Ahern's contribution to this state and its people will be remembered for many years. He set an example for all of us to follow.