




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 16 March 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Johnson, Mr VG, OAM

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (10.07 am): What an honour it is to rise to contribute to this condolence motion for Vaughan Johnson, the former member for Gregory. He was a wonderful friend, colleague and as tough—I had to change my words here—as an old boot. Firstly, my sincerest condolences to Vaughan’s family—to Robin, his children Monique, Tanya and Michael, to the extended Johnson family and to all of Vaughan’s grandchildren. Emma and Molly, I know that he would be proud that you could be here today, but I know there are others. Monique and Tanya, I want to thank you because I was often in trouble because of you two with the then chief government whip. Your dad would look at both Lisa France and I and say, ‘You girls, you’re just like my daughters! I know what you’re up to! You’ve got that look in your eye,’ and then he would go on and continue to regale many stories of what you girls got up to. Lisa and I were nothing like you, I promise!

As we have heard today, Vaughan was a member of this House for 25 years and before that a councillor for his local region. That background certainly cemented his passion and his strong advocacy for rural and regional Queensland, and it was just so obvious. In his first speech Vaughan said—

The constituents of Gregory can rest assured that they will receive total and sincere representation. I pledge myself to represent and assist people, no matter what their political persuasions, to achieve the quality of life that they desire.

He did that in spades. He lived that promise throughout his time as the member for Gregory. In fact, he continued it until the time of his passing.

I cannot believe we have come this far in the condolence motion without talking about how many times he was kicked out of this chamber or threatened to take someone outside. When I was chatting to Michael earlier he mentioned to me he thought that maybe his dad had a permanent booking outside of the chamber for the times that he was not allowed back on the premises. Vaughan valued greatly his time in this chamber as transport and main roads minister. The whole time I knew Vaughan he talked at great length to me about it. I did always laugh at the taxi story. When Vaughan was the minister for main roads he actually took a taxi with a staff member and the taxidriver got a flat tyre. The staffer said to the minister, ‘We are in a bit of a hurry. I will just call another taxi.’ Vaughan said, ‘Don’t be stupid,’ and got out and changed the taxidriver’s tyre. That is the type of person he was. He was always there to help and he was happy to get his hands dirty.

It was a real honour to be in this chamber with Vaughan during my first—and his last—term. I sat between Howard Hobbs and Ian Rickuss with Vaughan Johnson right in front of me. It was a complete baptism of fire. As a new member of parliament, being very nervous about speaking—I am not sure that was ever the case—every time I would stand up and speak he would try to put me off by saying unparliamentary words. It was terrible. If he could not get out the unparliamentary word he would just simply say ‘sheila’ because he knew full well it would get the desired reaction. He knew exactly what he was saying.

One of the first times I met Vaughan I was campaigning at the Toogoolawah cattle sales. Vaughan came along with me because he thought I needed some advice as to how to wrangle some local farmers at a cattle sale and on how I should be elected. I spent ages talking to this one gentleman who had a real issue. He walked over to me and he said—he actually did say 'sheila' then—'You're spending too much bloody time with that bloke. He's going to vote for Labor anyway.'

Ms Grace: Yes!

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: One of the few! He won them over with his handshake. As the Leader of the Opposition has mentioned, there was a softer side to Vaughan in the chamber. During my first term Saxon Rice had her baby and Lisa France had really young kids. Just recently Saxon was telling me that when she had baby Imogen here in the chamber she recalled that Vaughan did everything he possibly could to support her with baby Imogen, including giving her a Tambo Teddy so she had something to cuddle. He also thought it was good for the tourism push that a baby in the chamber was holding a Tambo Teddy.

There is so much that Western Queensland can be thankful for, whether it is roads or the cluster fencing that I know Vaughan was so immensely proud of. Then minister Cripps always tries to take the credit for cluster fencing, but Vaughan pushed during that term to get that up. That area of Queensland has never been the same. It was a wonderful contribution to that part of Queensland. I am pleased that my colleague the member for Gregory mentioned the Vaughan Johnson lookout on the Bedourie to Boulia road because that is one place that the people of Western Queensland and his family and friends can go and remember the late, great Vaughan Johnson. In his maiden speech Vaughan referred to the men and women of his electorate as angels in isolation and he treated them as such. Vaughan, you fought the good fight. Vaughan, you made your mark, and now may you rest in peace.