



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

---

Record of Proceedings, 16 November 2023

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Barton, Hon. TA**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (9.43 am): I join others in speaking on this condolence motion. I was thinking about what I was going to say about Tom Barton—and his family knows that I had a long history with Tom, working with him in many different forms—and I considered all that he achieved in his life. We often stand here and talk about a person and, no matter how much time we have, it is often difficult to talk about everything that person has achieved in their life. Can I say to the family that I feel that Tom is one of those people.

Tom had a very distinguished union career. He became the North Queensland state organiser for the mighty metal workers union and he was always proud of that. That union started a long way back, in 1975, and he became their first research officer in 1981. Subsequently, he became the assistant general secretary and general secretary of the Trades and Labor Council, now known as the QCU. He did incredible work as a member of the ACTU wages committee, from 1984 to 1992, which saw many wage classifications and pay structures for workers transformed through the common rule awards of the metal trades award. He was a member of the ACTU executive and he was involved in some iconic industrial relations issues such as the era of the accord process nationally—Tom would often speak about those times—and, of course, during the 1985 SEQEB dispute, which many of us will never forget as a defining moment in Queensland's industrial relations history.

Tom was a founding director of Sunsuper. He had a very strong belief that workers should have a well-funded retirement and was a big supporter of superannuation. In fact, we worked together when we had the common rule awards test case about implementing the superannuation levy here in Queensland. We had a cunning plan of ensuring that our common rule awards had Sunsuper as a default fund if there was not a fund that employees' superannuation was paid into. That one particular essence that we managed to get in our common rule industrial awards ensured Sunsuper's growth. I know that he would have been so proud when we amalgamated Sunsuper with QSuper very recently to forge the mighty Australian Retirement Trust, which has funds under their management of over \$260 billion and looks after the funds of over 2.3 million workers. Who would have thought years ago that, as a foundation member and a foundation director of Sunsuper, we would be in this position now? I have no doubt that Tom knew where superannuation would go once that had occurred.

As the member for Waterford Tom served his community extremely well, as we heard from the current member for Waterford and minister. He was always proud to represent those people. As minister for state development—I was on the South Bank board at the time—he oversaw the construction of the Goodwill Bridge. We worked together on that—and what a great project that was. Because he loved his Rugby League, I know that he was very proud in the development of Lang Park to Suncorp Stadium. He would often talk very fondly of that as well.

Having said that, Tom and I share a lot of similarities—his birthday is one day before mine, on 11 August, and we are both Leos. Tom and I in fact both became assistant secretary of the QCU and then secretary of the QCU, or the TLC in his case. I am currently, as he was, the Minister for Employment and Minister for Industrial Relations. We share similar career paths, but the similarity does not end there. We were assistant secretaries and state secretaries at a time when there was a lot of change. He knew how proud I was when he employed me as the first female industrial officer when he became secretary of the QCU and the work that we did together.

There is a funny story which I did not know whether I would tell or not, but I know Traute would really appreciate this. I remember a time as industrial officer when we were going to have a meeting with Wayne Goss. We were going through some industrial issues in this state that we wanted to raise with the government. I was tasked with putting together a booklet of all of those issues—to precis all of the issues and put them in a booklet—and we would go a meeting with the premier and go through it. Somehow everybody else's booklet was perfect. There were about 15 issues and they were all lined up perfectly. Tom Barton's unfortunately for some reason got muddled up. It was not just that one section was put in front of another; when I say 'muddled up' I mean that these items were scattered everywhere in the booklet.

Tom was known to be a very calm person, but when things did not go quite his way in a meeting he had a way of letting you know that he was not very happy! Traute would appreciate that that day he was not very happy with me at all! I was very quick to point out that I did not do the administrative functions at the QCU and that it was not my fault at all, and I quickly handed him my booklet.

Tom was also very proud of the fact that he was born in Ayr. Although he moved to Brisbane in 1981, Tom was never a Brisbane person; he was always a North Queenslander. He was very proud of his apprenticeship and his work in the sugar and alumina industries as an instrument fitter. He loved his supercar racing and Rugby League.

When I was the very newly minted first female industrial officer at the QCU, I borrowed Tom's car to attend a meeting or something. Wouldn't you know it, despite never having had any accident in a vehicle I happened to have a minor prang and scratched Tom's much adored and loved work vehicle. Although he was calm when I returned and told him that unfortunately his pride and joy had a big scratch down the passenger side, his face told the story that he was not very happy with me at all. Thank goodness I did good work for Tom, and that overrode all of those minor infringements.

Tom also spoke fondly of his ability to work across the political spectrum, and he was really proud of his work with employer organisations. Let me tell you, he was a tough negotiator. If you ever wanted to pick an industrial advocate to be on your team, my first pick would be Tom Barton, because when he came in to support you on an issue he did it with such passion, knowledge and gusto that you would want him on your team every time. At the same time, he often spoke fondly about his relationship with employer organisations. There was mutual respect there.

I remember one time having discussions with him about negotiating with the late Russ Hinze, the late Mike Ahern and Rob Borbidge. It was not that they did not have some ding-dong battles, but there was an ability to negotiate and work together. I think that demonstrates the strength of Tom's character. I remember on more than one occasion the late Sir Llew Edwards observing Tom's ability to put politics aside when it really mattered, and he commended him for ensuring we had industrial harmony during World Expo 88. Tom was often instrumental in ensuring that our volunteers and those who worked there got a good deal and putting it aside so we had a successful World Expo 88. I remember Sir Llew telling me about his dealings with Tom in relation to that.

I also loved that Tom had a softer side. There is no doubt that he had a tough side, but he also had a softer side. He was a keen watercolour artist. He knew where I lived in the New Farm area. I remember him painting the Brunswick Hotel in my electorate of McConnel, and it was absolutely gorgeous. You would not think he had that skill, but he was a very fine watercolour artist. That was one of the many talents he had. I want to quickly quote from Tom's maiden speech. He said—

Employees in this State have a right to a job which is secure, a job where their safety at work is protected, a job which provides them and their family with a decent standard of living, and—possibly more importantly—a job which provides them with satisfaction while they are at work.

He loved people enjoying their job. He went on to say—

As a member of Parliament, I will be making my first priority the achievement and maintenance of those reasonable aspirations of working people.

...

Being elected as a member of Parliament has given me a new set of better tools to do an even more important job. To date, I am not finding it a lot different from my role as a trade union official. It allows me to serve the interests of others, particularly those who are less fortunate, or less privileged, and to ensure that they get a fair go and can achieve what they are entitled to achieve.

Those are the words of Tom Barton from his maiden speech, and I think they encapsulate his values, his beliefs and his tireless efforts to help working people in this state. May he rest in peace. Vale, Tom Barton. My sincere condolences go to Traute, his children, Donna and Darren, and his family and loved ones.