




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Johnson, Mr VG, OAM

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (9.58 am): I never thought I would be in this place giving a condolence motion for a man who was simply a mentor and a friend. There is a great monument to Vaughan Johnson OAM, the member for Gregory for 25 years, at the Boulia Diamantina Shire Council boundaries, not far from the Northern Territory-Queensland boundary. It is called the Vaughan Johnson Lookout. It is a lookout on a jump-up that has an amazing and beautiful view of the vastness of the Channel Country. To put it into context, its views are as big and as beautiful as Vaughan's heart, his famous big hands and his handshake. Diamantina shire mayor Robbie Dare said that the lookout was named after Vaughan in recognition of his advocacy and efforts made towards the advancements of sealed road networks in Western Queensland.

Accepting the honour, Vaughan stressed the importance of the continued need to push for infrastructure in the outback in Queensland. He said that, while there were not many of us out there, we provide a lot of dollars for this state, if not the country. You only need to look at the Diamantina shire to see this. Whether it is broadband or bitumen, we need to continue the fight. Vaughan would not want us to be sad, but that is pretty hard. When I got the news that Vaughan had passed away, it was very surreal. I had spoken to him only a week earlier. He was full of life and quick wit and he made me laugh.

As the minister for transport and main roads in the Borbidge government, he is famously remembered for the time he got caught in gridlock on the highway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. This was when the M1 was being built. He got out of his ministerial car and walked down the line of cars personally apologising to as many drivers as he could for the inconvenience caused. I can imagine the surprise of receiving a knock on the driver's door window by a big, stocky bloke from outback Queensland saying, 'Hello. I'm Vaughan Johnson, the minister for roads. I just want to apologise.' I can also imagine Vaughan picking up the phone to the planning department to share his opinions on the scheduling of the works during peak hour affecting so many people!

We all know Vaughan loved a yarn. It also got him into trouble. He just loved talking to people and listening to their concerns, and where it got him into trouble this time I will explain. Vaughan is the only politician to be sacked by the Longreach Meals on Wheels. Vaughan volunteered to do the Meals on Wheels lunch run with local coordinator and Longreach's loveliest lady the late Barb Morton. As members know, the secret to a successful Meals on Wheels run is to get the hot food, with only alfoil over it to keep it warm, in as quickly as possible and get back in the car for the next meal to be delivered. Vaughan's job was to be the runner while Barb kept the car running and ready to go.

Well, the first stop was Vaughan's downfall. The first stop, unbeknown to Vaughan, was an elderly good old mate of his from Quilpie who eventually retired in Longreach. Vaughan knocked on the door and the elderly gentleman opened the door and said, 'G'day, Vaughan. Haven't seen you for a long

time. Come in.' Vaughan placed the meals on the bench and the elderly gentleman said, 'Come and sit down on the couch. Have a yarn.' You have to remember that during this time Barb is still out in the car expecting Vaughan to be back in the car in 30 seconds. The elderly gentleman said, 'How're you going? Haven't seen you for a while, Vaughan.' Vaughan responded, 'Great to catch up. How've you been? How's this person? What's happening down in Quilpie?' and so on and so on, reminiscing about old mates. About five minutes later there was a hell of a bang on the door. It was Barb, who yelled, 'Where the hell are you, Vaughan? The meals are going cold. What are you doing?' Vaughan replied, 'I'm just catching up with an old mate from Quilpie, Barb.' Barb yelled back, 'I'll give you catch up with old mate! Get back in the car! We have 50 meals to deliver and they're getting cold and I think they would like those lunch meals before four o'clock!'

Of course, as we have heard, Vaughan hated flying. There was the time when he was travelling back from the west on a charter on a hot summer's day with lots of turbulence and bad crosswinds. When the plane landed the pilot got out and opened the door and Vaughan stumbled out. The pilot said, 'How was the flight?' Vaughan said, 'Yeah, fine. You can have your armrest back now.' I remember over 20 years ago I flew with Vaughan from Emerald to Ayr in North Queensland for a rally with canegrowers concerned about the impacts of deregulation of the sugar industry. Vaughan wanted me to come along because my wife is from Ayr and I could introduce him to a few farmers. Flying up was okay, but at four o'clock in the afternoon the typical summer weather set in over Ayr. I quickly rounded up Vaughan and said, 'Mate, we need to go before this sets in.' We took off in bad weather. The pilot, who looked 17 but I am sure he was older, had no fear—straight into the clouds and into the turbulence. Vaughan was starting to look distressed to the point where he grabbed the other seatbelt beside him and wrapped it around his legs thinking that if the plane went down this would save him. Of course I am used to planes, growing up around crop dusters, so I could see his distress. I turned to the pilot and I said, 'Hey, Maverick,'—referencing *Top Gun* because he thought he was in *Top Gun*—'any chance you could pull this plane up 500 feet and aim for that gap in the clouds and lead us into clear weather?' The pilot said to me, 'It's only a bit of turbulence and a bit of rain.' I said, 'I know, mate. I know, Tom Cruise, but if you don't this bloke behind me is about to rip the fuselage apart and we'll all hit the ground.'

I cannot do this tribute without extending my many thanks to Vaughan's family, especially Robin, Monique, Tanya and Michael and their grandchildren and their extended family. In public life, as we know, sacrifice cuts two ways. While Vaughan sacrificed much to serve Gregory and Queensland, his family also bore the cost of those sacrifices and deserve our deepest gratitude for that. Their love and support was a mainstay in his retirement and it was a joy.

I am personally so grateful for his friendship and for the advice and support he gave me when I became the member for Gregory. He has not only been a real friend but an inspiration. He brought energy, courage, shrewd intelligence and an authentic love for people to the job and he has made a lasting impression. While the fight goes on, the contributions will remain as an inspiration and a strength. Vaughan was a special bloke and he reminds me of Kipling's famous poem *If*. To quote just a part of that as a tribute Vaughan—

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

...

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

Vale, Vaughan Johnson, OAM.