




Speech By
Lance McCallum

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Gordon, Mr WJ

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (10.16 am): I rise to acknowledge and pay tribute to Billy Gordon. Billy was a proud Bar Barrum man from the western tablelands of Far North Queensland. Billy was just the third Indigenous parliamentarian to be elected to this place when he assumed office as the member for Cook in 2015. I am only the fifth. That is five out of the 1,295 members of both the Queensland Legislative Assembly and the Queensland Legislative Council or 0.038 per cent in 163 years of history. That is particularly poignant on a day like today when legislation was introduced into the federal parliament for a First Nations voice. It also makes Billy's contribution rare and special.

There is no doubt that Billy had been around the block more than a few times. He had a colourful and complicated past. I quote from his inaugural speech where Billy said—

My story and my life does not make for the typical member of parliament. I have no doubt that my life has been vastly different from most of my colleagues here in this place.

Never a truer word was spoken. I think we would all acknowledge that as human beings we are complex.

Billy was a strong supporter and advocate for the Kupai Omasker working group and their work, which led to the traditional Torres Strait Islander cultural practice of interfamily adoption being given legal force in this place in 2021. That was a proud moment and I am sure that Billy was very happy with his contribution.

As we have heard, Billy also ran as the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Leichardt in 2013. I would like to recount a found memory that was shared with me by one of his campaign team—

Billy was obviously a real character who put his hand up to represent his people. He had a real affinity with people.

I remember he ran for the federal seat of Leichardt up in Cairns and we put up a corflute right in the middle of a busy intersection where hundreds and hundreds of cars would go past every day.

It was an amazing spot in the suburb of Manunda that has really gone ahead in a big way now.

The corflute was there for about one day—and it said 'Vote for Billy Gordon'.

We got up the next day to go and do some high-vis, and the corflute had been vandalised with red paint.

Unfortunately, a few vandalised corflutes can often be part of every campaign, it comes with the territory.

But this one was different.

When we got closer we realised that the bright red paint on the corflute said 'Ya better!'

So we left it there for the duration of the campaign—a corflute that said 'Vote for Billy Gordon—Ya better!'

And that summed up how passionate people were about Billy in his community and what he could do—and did do—for his people and his local community.

I want to thank Stuart for sharing that memory.

I recall after I was elected that Billy reached out to congratulate me and we shared a private moment. I was very grateful for that. I had the fortune of a chance encounter last year with Billy only weeks before he would pass away. I was with the member for Hervey Bay and we ran into Billy by chance. We took the opportunity to go together. We had a quiet beer and a catch-up. By that point, Billy had seen better days physically. He was not moving too freely but, as we sat and we shared time together, it was clear that Billy was still as sharp as ever and his brilliant wit was still shining through. I am incredibly grateful for that time that we were able to spend together.

A life cannot be measured by a contribution in this place. As human beings we are much more than that. Billy was a successful businessman and is survived by his family and his loved ones. I acknowledge his partner Olympia, his sister Megan, and Olivia who have travelled here to join us in the gallery today. He passed away aged just 49, 34 years less than the 83.2 year average of the male life expectancy in Australia, which is almost a lifetime in itself. We express and I express sincere condolences to Billy's family and his loved ones. Vale, William John Gordon. Gone too soon.