



Speech By  
**Hon. Leanne Enoch**


**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Gordon, Mr WJ**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (9.48 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion for the former member for Cook Billy Gordon after his sudden passing on 25 November 2022 at the age of just 49. I acknowledge his family who are with us in the gallery, his beautiful partner Olympia who he described to many people as the love of his life and his soulmate, his sister Megan and Billy's beautiful little niece Olivia. I also acknowledge Billy's many family members and friends, who are not here today, but who are no doubt still living with the great grief of his loss.

William John Gordon or, as we all knew him, Billy Gordon, was a proud Bar Barrum man from the western tablelands of Far North Queensland. When he was elected to the Queensland parliament he was only the second Aboriginal man to ever enter this House—something I know he and many in the community took great pride in but at the same time understood the immense responsibility and expectation such an achievement brought with it.

I first met Billy almost a decade and a half ago during the early days of the establishment of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. We were moving in similar circles at the time and had the chance to be involved in a number of big and important conversations. I remember his humour and confidence, his wide network—I mean, this bloke seemed to know everybody—and his ability to switch codes so fluently, but my lasting memory of that time of first meeting him was his sharp understanding of policy, his passion for social justice and the articulate nature of his contributions—something that of course we saw in this House.

We were both involved in politics at the time. He was helping out as the Mount Isa EO when Betty Kiernan was the local member. I remember us talking about the potential paths to parliament, not imagining for one minute that either of us might have the honour to serve in this place one day. We certainly could not have imagined back then that in 2015 we would share a history-making moment when we entered parliament at the same time.

When Billy took his seat in this House, it was the first time in a generation after the trailblazing Uncle Eric Deeral served as the member for Cook in the 1970s that a First Nations person represented that seat and the first time in history that two First Nations peoples occupied places in this House. Now of course in the seat of Cook we have Cynthia Lui, the first Torres Strait Islander person to ever be elected to any parliament in Australia, and I can say that I know Billy was very proud to have supported Cynthia and play his part in making history once again. Of course, with Lance McCallum, the member for Bundamba, we now have three First Nations peoples in this parliament at the same time.

A growing First Nations caucus is something I know Billy was proud to see emerging and something that we talked about right from the start. He was always thinking about how to engage more First Nations peoples in democratic and parliamentary processes as a means to progress important social and economic issues across Indigenous communities.

As the only two First Nations peoples in this place after the 2015 election, Billy and I shared a special bond. We both understood the extra responsibilities that we carried and the weight of these responsibilities, but for Billy when he joined the crossbench during a hung parliament where his vote was a defining one he carried an extraordinary amount of responsibility—in many ways, more than anyone else in this place. The pressure on him at that time was physically visible. He was supported by family and friends, and I do want to acknowledge in particular Kerry Klimm and Jerome Pang who together with Billy formed a tongue-in-cheek group that they called the ‘Gordon Australia Party’, or GAP for short, so you can imagine the kinds of jokes about ‘closing the GAP’ and all of those things. There was a lot of fun and laughter in that group, let me tell you, and many of us were allowed to be visitors to the ‘Gordon Australia Party’ on occasion and there are way too many stories to share in this House, some probably not even appropriate.

There should never be a question of Billy Gordon’s absolute passion for his community, his place in the history books and his contribution to this place. In his maiden speech Billy said when Uncle Eric Deeral was elected as the member for Cook in 1974 he was just a one-year-old. He said—

I was born at a time when my skin colour would determine the level of education I would receive, the employment opportunities that would be available to me and even the quality of health that I would enjoy. I was born to parents who were battlers. My father worked hard as a canecutter and on the railways and my mother was a hardworking nurse. Indeed, I was born working class.

Billy never strayed from his working-class roots, representing the people of Cook with authenticity and a deep commitment to First Nations peoples. His legacy includes great government investment in the seat of Cook and, importantly, the passing of critical, impactful legislation during his term of parliament. When the Palaszczuk government ended sandmining on Minjerribah, Billy supported the government from the crossbench and said in his speech—

... I have listened to many people, particularly the Quandamooka people. The Quandamooka people have bled long enough. They have cried long enough. Their wait is now over. Today, the Quandamooka people will no longer be beggars at the gates of their own kingdom. Rather, they will be masters of their own dreaming.

I for one as a Quandamooka woman thank him every day for those words. Of course, in 2016 he voted with the government to amend adoption legislation in Queensland in order to make it legal for same-sex couples to adopt—both life-changing legislation.

By chance I ran into Billy just 10 days before his passing. He was still that person I had met over a decade ago. His humour and confidence were on point, his passion for First Nations people was unchanged and his articulate contributions to complex issues was at the fore, as it always was. We talked for a short time and said our goodbyes, promising to catch up soon. However, when I went to call him a couple of days later I soon realised that none of the five numbers I had for him were actually still active—honestly, I have never known someone who changed his number as often as he did—but those words of goodbye obviously broke my heart when I heard of his passing just those few days later.

With Billy’s passing in November last year we acknowledge the loss of a man who was deeply committed to serving his community and every day navigated a complex environment to do just that. I join with the House in offering our condolences to his family and to his friends, of which there are many. What I want to say for Billy is that I hope from my heart he rests with our ancestors and with his ancestors and that he will not be forgotten in this place and he will not be forgotten in my family. Vale, Billy Gordon.