



Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Bailey**


**MEMBER FOR MILLER**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2023

## **MOTION OF CONDOLENCE**

**Gordon, Mr WJ**

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.31 am): I first met Billy Gordon a few months after he had run for the federal seat of Leichhardt in late 2013 when he was working as a staffer for former senator Jan McLucas in Cairns. We had a meeting in my previous role as an environmental campaigner and with me was a fellow campaigner who was from a First Nations background himself. I had heard of Billy, saw that he had run a good, though unsuccessful, campaign for federal parliament in an election that was difficult for our side, but I had never actually met him. We were both very impressed—articulate, smart, engaging and present. It was a productive meeting and I was sure that I would meet him again.

I was very pleased to hear in 2014 that Billy became the Labor candidate for the seat of Cook, then held by the Newman government. He joined our state Labor team with a herculean task ahead of us. As someone who had followed state politics, I was very conscious of the almost total absence of members from a First Nations background in the history of this House so the prospect of Billy being elected, along with my southside neighbour, colleague and friend, the current Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy, the member for Algester, as part of a reinvigorated Labor team was an electoral prospect of historic proportions, long overdue and would be momentous. To have two First Nations members elected to the Queensland parliament at the same election, including the first ever woman, had never been achieved across 54 elections and 155 years.

Of course, that history was made on 31 January 2015. The minister was elected and took her place as the first female First Nations MP in the Queensland parliament and the first cabinet minister from a First Nations heritage. Billy was also a part of that history, but in a way no-one could have predicted on election night. For a brief time Billy was part of the formation of a new government in this state when the numbers were as tight as they could be. He had put it on the line, he gave it a red hot go twice and succeeded on the second occasion. No-one can ever take that record away from him. Billy Gordon made a difference.

The events that followed which saw him join the crossbench were difficult, understandably for both him and for the government. It is fair to say—and I am sure Billy would have been the first to agree—that he was not a perfect person, he had flaws and he had made mistakes in life. A number of things that surfaced during the term meant his time on the crossbench could not change. Despite being a crossbencher for most of the 55th Parliament, under extraordinary media and opposition pressure, Billy sought to back in his progressive values at each sitting to make his time here count.

A first term is always a learning curve for any member of this House, but given the minority government status, the tight numbers, the consequent intensity of the media focus and his membership of then a much smaller crossbench, the pressure on Billy to be across all matters at every sitting was immense, but he gave it his all. There have been few single terms in this House since 1860 like Billy Gordon's.

On most occasions during that parliament, Billy, along with the government, used his vote for reform on a wide range of measures which were substantial and lasting and will never be undone. There is no doubt that his vote was crucial, and crucial often. Many members who have to leave a governing party involuntarily for the crossbench are often then a handful, to say the least, and few remain loyal or even civil at times to those that they are no longer with. Billy Gordon was a rare exception on virtually every occasion. As he said to a member of my staff over a late night sitting beer, 'I'm a Labor man and I always will be sista.'

His affinity and loyalty was always with the working class because he had been a hands-on worker across a range of industries, as outlined by a range of speakers today, from early on in his life and he never forgot where he came from. He always strove to improve the lives of working people—all working people.

Despite the separation early in the term, Billy earned the respect of many members of this House, many of whom remain here today. During the last parliamentary term of then non-family friendly hours, it is fair to say that Billy was a fairly social member around the corridors of this place and it is fair to say he liked a drink. He loved the free-flowing dialogue that went with it. He is not unique in that.

He was always thoughtful and could be devastatingly funny, with a dry, quick wit—something all of his many friends here will recall fondly. He helped educate plenty of MPs on aspects of First Nations culture, including Torres Strait culture. He lived a varied life, as has been outlined by others, and I am certain a much more varied life than many of us here today.

We need people like that in this House. Democracy needs people like that in this House. In an educated era, people who have been to the school of hard knocks do not get through as much, but Billy did. His perspectives on issues were often grounded in his own life, his experiences as a First Nations man, a regional Queenslander and a Far North Queenslander. His stories were never dull. He was a great raconteur and an entertainer but without pretences.

After parliament he had a special interest in developing economic empowerment and opportunities for First Nations communities, including in the area of carbon farming on Indigenous controlled land. He had settled down after a tumultuous term in parliament and met Olympia Little of whom he said, 'He had met his match.' I acknowledge Olympia in gallery today and offer my sincerest condolences for her loss. I also extend my condolences to Billy's sister Megan Carpenter and niece Olivia Carpenter who are with us in the gallery today. Your brother, uncle and partner will be much missed.

Billy would be the first to say he was no angel. He was, however, a good friend and one I am glad to have had and to have shared part of my journey with. I saw Billy a number of times since he left this chamber. He was always the same—cheerful, interested, curious. I did not consider then that the opportunity to catch up with him would cease so suddenly and far too early. I half expect to run into him in the corridor and can still see him floating around these hallways, popping his head in the door with a cheeky smile and a quip.

The term 'comrade' stems as a term of affection and solidarity for a fellow working-class person fighting for the same cause, dating from the shearers' strike in Barcaldine in 1891. It still gets used to this day at various times by those on this side of the chamber and in the labour movement.

Of course Billy, the great storyteller that he was, had his own way of saying a term that I have rarely heard said: 'See you, comrad,' he would say. Billy has returned to the source. He made a real difference in the short time that he was here. I hope he knew that. I will miss him. I know that many people in this chamber will miss him. He was a trailblazer, a great friend and a great comrad.