




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Gordon, Mr WJ

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (10.39 am): On 25 November 2022 William John Gordon, known to us all as Billy, passed away. Today I would like to extend my condolences for the passing of William John Gordon, 'Billy', to his children and extended family, including Olympia Little, his partner. Billy was a proud First Nations man from the western tablelands of Far North Queensland with family ties to Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. He grew up in Innisfail and spent his working life in Innisfail and in and around Cairns.

Billy's life before politics saw him engaged in the work that North Queensland had to offer, and from the testimonials at his service he was definitely not afraid of hard work. He was a proud member of the Army Reserve in North Queensland; he worked as a relations manager for a regional airline; he worked at Reconciliation Australia and performed native title work in Cairns. His work life reflected the love and high esteem he held for First Nations people and the people of North Queensland. After politics he worked as the chief executive of Indigenous Carbon Australia, a not-for-profit that helps First Nations communities set up and run carbon farming projects on traditional land. His working life was incredibly varied, demonstrating that he was always willing to turn his hand to new endeavours, to work hard at new opportunities. He obviously learned to value the dignity of labour, and he fought for the rights and conditions of working class people and their families.

As we all know, Billy Gordon was a member of this House. For most of that time he was an Independent member after having initially been elected as part of the Labor class of 2015. As a member he advocated for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef, job creation, projects in Cape York, many different agricultural industries in the Far North, the tourism industry and the protection of the natural environment in that beautiful part of the world. He described his motivation as a passion for justice tempered by a pragmatism to do what it takes to make change.

In this parliament Billy Gordon spoke about the people and values that mattered to him. He talked about the values taught to him by his grandfather, whom he called the greatest influence on his life. He learned from him that, if you have the ability to do good things for people, you have a moral obligation to do so. In his maiden speech Billy talked about his own life. 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 also paid tribute to his family, his sisters and his brother and his five wonderful children. He said that he loved them more than anything in the world. He also said—

My driving motivation is a desire for their lives to be different from mine. For them I want a Queensland and an Australia where all people have the opportunity to meet their full potential. For them I want a world where poverty, racism and oppression are no longer the things that define so many lives.

Billy spoke to me about many things. When he came back from Alice Springs after the signing of the Uluru statement Billy's comment to me was, 'How long will this take to happen for First Nations people?' His comment reminded me of his recitation of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem *Dreamtime* and the lament and hope within it. I know that if he was still with us he would be fighting for the Voice and we would be encouraged as we work our way to treaty—that things are happening. At his funeral in Mareeba, which I attended together with Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook, and Minister Craig Crawford, it was standing room only. Hundreds were there to celebrate and grieve this man who tried to bring about that world he hoped for for his children. At the funeral I also learned that his favourite colour was green—but not his politics. My one regret is that when Billy was under attack from the fourth estate I did not do enough to support him. It is difficult to do a tribute to Billy without mentioning his good mate, Duncan Pegg. Duncan was a true friend to Billy and kept in contact with him long after Billy left this place. Both passed away too early. Vale, Billy Gordon.