




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Gordon, Mr WJ

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympic and Paralympic Games Infrastructure) (9.37 am): I rise to express my condolences on the passing of Billy Gordon. To be honest, I cannot recall if I knew Billy before we were both elected in 2015 but, like most of the class of 2015, we bonded quickly, sharing experiences and laughs and every now and then very occasionally a drink over those long sitting nights.

Billy Gordon's time in this place was short, but his contribution was historic. Billy leaves a complex legacy, one of being a champion for the working class and for First Nations people, a Bar Barrum man and an improbable politician; a man chased throughout his life by the ghosts of his past—ghosts shared by all too many Aboriginal people, ghosts that ultimately chased him out of this place after just one term. I might attribute that to intergenerational trauma or to disadvantage, but he never did. He never blamed anyone but himself.

The former member for Cook was a trailblazer, one of just two Aboriginal people to join that class of 2015, the first since 1974. We cannot overstate the significance to those communities in the cape and in Torres Strait of having a First Nations man represent them here. He came to this place out of a deep frustration that voices like his were not represented at the table.

We have come a long way, with the member for Algeester thankfully still at that table and the member for Bundamba now at that table and, of course, Billy's successor the member for Cook. I know how proud he was that the seat of Cook was returned to Labor hands in 2017 and of what the now member for Cook has gone on to achieve since then. He dearly wanted to make sure that his actions did not cost this state a Labor government.

Elected in 2015, he led the campaign in the state's far north against privatisation, recognising the enormous contribution that state-owned energy assets make to rural and remote communities. He, and the places he represented, knew that a Labor government would make a world of difference for their people. Despite serving most of his first term in office on the crossbench, he was a Labor man and he loved our party for its ability to do good, to deliver better outcomes for people in rural and remote Queensland and to empower First Nations Queenslanders like him to close the gap. His dedication to the Labor Party was on full display when in 2017 he elected to stand down, rather than act as a spoiler to the new Labor candidate. Lesser people in similar circumstances could have acted like a wrecker. He could have secured himself a better financial outcome at the very least. Members might recall that some did but instead, he worked constructively with us to deliver for his community. He supported this government from 2015 until his passing and we are grateful for his support that allowed us to deliver for Queenslanders.

Members will recall that that term in minority government was occasionally wild. As environment minister I passed a lot of laws that term and every one of them relied on some combination of government votes, Billy's vote, the now members for Traeger or Hill, or the then member for Nicklin to achieve a majority. Sometimes they were difficult policy positions, with opposing views in Cook and amongst First Nations people. Things like ending sandmining on Minjerrabah or ending broadscale land clearing of native forests on the cape meant meeting regularly with Billy, explaining a policy position, asking for his support, then desperately hoping he would come to vote when the bells rang at 1 or 2 am. I can remember looking up at Billy's seat up there, seeing him rush in at the last moment—mostly—looking for some sign or signal on his face that he was voting my way, knowing that he was a man of his word and that he would, except for that one night when he did not. Despite multiple conversations and text messages, there was that one night when late one night Billy voted down a government bill. He protested after the division that he had made a mistake and maintained that position with me personally afterwards and even for years later when I ribbed him about it. That particular bill was so vexed in his community; it was probably the hardest thing I asked him to vote for. I never blamed him about whether it was truly a mistake or not.

Billy was a loud voice against racism and bigotry who called out the unholy alliance that trades in fear, ignorance and hate. At his passing, he was the CEO of Indigenous Carbon Australia. I understand it was a job he deeply loved and was passionate about. He continued to serve First Nations people by caring for country and protecting our environment. His age—only 49—highlights the extreme disadvantage that First Nations Queenslanders still face. They live shorter lives, have worse health outcomes, and face struggles that most of us could only imagine. Billy was a powerful voice for his community and there was never any doubt about whose side he was on. He understood better than most the complex issues at play in Indigenous communities and he always advocated for community-led solutions.

Billy's legacy lives on as we stride towards truth, towards treaty and towards having an Indigenous Voice in the Australian parliament. This is a path our state would not be on if the people of Cook had not elected Billy Gordon in 2015. A treaty will empower First Nations people to deliver community-led solutions to the issues they face. It will give a voice to injustice and allow Queensland to right our wrongs. His legacy is much bigger than the nearly three years that he spent here; it will live on. I acknowledge Billy's partner Olympia, his sister Megan and niece Olivia, who are joining us in the gallery today. Vale, my mate, William John Gordon.