

Speech By

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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Lester, Hon. VP OAM

Dr ROWAN (Moggill—LNP) (10.06 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion for the late Vincent Patrick Lester OAM, a distinguished former member of this House, a devoted servant of Queensland and an outstanding Australian. Vince Lester's life was one of service, shaped by his country upbringing, his love of family and his enduring commitment to the communities he represented.

Vince Lester served for over three decades in the Queensland parliament as the state member for Belyando, Peak Downs and, finally, Keppel. He was a Queensland state minister, also serving on numerous parliamentary committees, and towards the end of his parliamentary career he served as opposition whip. However, Vince Lester's contribution cannot be measured simply by titles or years of service alone. His immense contribution can also be found in the people he helped, the communities he championed, and the kindness and character he brought to public life.

Vince Lester was born in Charleville in 1939 and spent his early years on properties in Western Queensland. His father, Fred, worked on stations and his mother, Mary Ann, worked as a cook. Tragically, Vince lost his father when he was just 10 years old. His mother moved with him to Toowoomba, where she worked hard to provide for Vince. In her eulogy, Vince's daughter Mary-Ann Gurney spoke of the sacrifices her grandmother made and how her father never forgot them. Those early experiences shaped a man who understood hard work, adversity and the importance of looking after others.

After school, Vince Lester became an apprentice baker. He and his wife, Mary, later moved to Central Queensland, where they eventually purchased a bakery in Clermont. Together, they built a life and raised their daughters, Mary-Ann and Veronica. They also became part of the fabric of their local community. Vince was involved in Rotary, the Clermont Hospital board, the chamber of commerce and the local rugby league club. He also served as a councillor before entering the Queensland parliament in 1974.

Vince was a champion of rural and regional health care and was certainly a friend of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland and the broader rural doctor movement. His willingness to help was matched by his distinctive sense of humour. When the Clermont football club needed to raise money, Vince famously walked backwards from Blair Athol to Clermont. It was an extraordinary effort and one that reflected his determination to get on with the job. He continued to undertake walks for charity, raising funds for worthy causes and bringing his own unmistakable style to community service.

At Vince Lester's funeral his eldest daughter, Mary-Ann Gurney, reflected on his years in the Queensland parliament. She said—

Dad never forgot his roots, his country upbringing, fighting for the little person with no voice. He was a people's pollie and was very well respected across all areas of government and political parties.

Mary-Ann also spoke of her father's commitment to training and education and his desire to help young people who might not have had the opportunity to attend university to gain a qualification. That commitment was reflected in Vince's ministerial responsibilities, including employment, training and industrial affairs, small business and police. He was also proud of his role in securing a TAFE facility for Emerald, providing opportunities for people in Central Queensland to learn skills and build their futures. Throughout his significant parliamentary service he remained grounded in the communities he represented and approachable to people of different political views. In 2006 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to the community through the Queensland parliament and to local government. It was a fitting recognition of a lifetime spent in the service of others.

Of course, behind the public life Vince Lester was a much loved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Mary-Ann spoke of the dance where her father first met her mother, Mary. As she put it, they continued to dance together for the next 62 years. She also shared the pride Vince took in his grandchildren, whether he was helping them to get to their weekend sport or celebrating their achievements, both large and small. Those memories reveal the same generosity of spirit that marked his public service. Mary-Ann described her father as a humble, kind and caring man who lived an incredibly full and faith-filled life. On behalf of the Queensland parliament, I extend my deepest condolences to Mary, to Mary-Ann and Veronica, to Vince's grandchildren and great-grandchildren and to all of his family and friends. We thank Vince Lester for his dedicated service to Queensland and for his advocacy on behalf of rural and regional communities, as well as his service to the National Party. Vale, the Hon. Vince Lester OAM.