



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Wilton, Mr Gregory Stuart**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 19 June 2000**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 19 June 2000  
**Page** 17574  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Abbott, Tony, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Minister for Employment Services) (2.55 pm)—The terrible tragedy which has befallen our late friend and colleague—the horror and mystery which we can hardly begin to comprehend—should force us to take stock of ourselves and our institution, as the Chief Opposition Whip and the Chief Government Whip have just suggested. It seems to me that, like so many, Greg Wilton came with high hopes to what he regarded as the greatest institution in the nation for helping people and the greatest forum in the nation for debating big issues, and yet, as his mother and sister said in his death notice, he died of a broken heart. The sad truth seems to be that this parliament, and politics generally, did not live up to his expectations as a place to build a better world. In this sense we have probably all badly let him down.

As many have said, he was a regular at the gym. It was pretty clear from the staccato conversations that you have between the chin-ups and the push-ups that he deeply lamented the mindless point scoring which so often passes for debate in here, and he deeply lamented the fact that so often what we were dealing with seemed essentially trivial. He hated the character assassination which sadly is so much a part of the public discourse and the private conversation here and for which all of us bear a heavy responsibility.

Of course, there are explanations for these things. A country which does not need to worry about comparatively big things will tend to worry, sometimes obsessively, about comparatively small things. People will always fight over who should exercise power, even such circumscribed power as we exercise in this place. But, Mr Speaker, at the heart of his lament I think there is a very valid point. Even when our opponents are doing their worst by our lights, by their own lights they are still doing their best. We often complain about the low public standing of politicians, but other people take us at our own estimation, and we are always running each other down. Of course, there is a place for judgment, and sometimes there is a place for furious denunciation, but I think Australia would be better off without the feral quality which so often contaminates our public lives.

Greg Wilton, like all of us, wanted to make a difference. Following on from the words of the Chief Opposition Whip and the Chief Government Whip, if in this place, from this time, those of us who knew him could try harder to give credit where it is due, I suspect that he might end up making the kind of mark he sought. We did not reach out to him enough in his life. None of us reaches out enough to any of our colleagues, and we should not wait until they have gone to appreciate them. Obviously Greg Wilton was not gentle on himself, and I think the best thing we could do would be to rededicate ourselves to being kinder and gentler to each other, as he would have wished. It is all very well to talk about outside help, but the best help is the help we can provide to each other. Had Greg been able to listen to this debate, I am sure he would have felt much more proud of the parliament that he has so tragically left.