



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Nugent, Mr Peter Edward**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 22 May 2001**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 22 May 2001  
**Page** 26703  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Pyne, Chris, MP

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

**Mr PYNE** (Sturt) (5.12 pm)—I would like to place on record my condolences for Carol and her family and my good wishes to them in the future. Carol and Peter were dinner companions of mine here in Canberra. We used to go out together regularly because we had so much in common and I got to know Peter and Carol very well. From 1993 onwards, I used to be a regular person in his office at the cheese, chocolate and drinks parties he had which the member for Hindmarsh talked about. What struck me very much about Peter and at the funeral at Wantirna a couple of weeks ago was that he was a very unaffected man. At that funeral it was talked about how his favourite thing to do in the whole world was to get into his tracky-daks—I think that is what they were called at the funeral—and sit back with Carol with a bottle of red wine in front of the fire and say that this was the happiest time of his life. It was reflected here in Canberra, because my other enduring memory of Carol and Peter is seeing them, as I arrived every morning, walking along in their tracksuits and going home every night. That sums up what an unaffected and unpretentious person Peter Nugent was. There was nothing about him that made you feel uneasy. He was easy company to be with. He was an easy dinner and drinks companion.

I had a very high regard for Peter Nugent and for the causes with which he associated himself over his parliamentary career. Many of them were causes that I shared with him. He was very proud of the role he played in parliament over those 11 years in the areas in which he took a great interest. He was very proud of his role in indigenous affairs. He thought one of the great achievements of his political career was the six years that he had on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. I know that he was sorry to give that up but was very pleased to have had the opportunity over that time to have contributed to indigenous affairs on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

He was shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs in the 37th parliament. That was when we became friends for the first time, because he approached me and asked whether I would go on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs so that I could help them out in a policy sense as a new member of parliament. He knew that I had a keen interest in indigenous relationships. I agreed to go on that committee. When he ended his role as shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs, I offered to go off the committee for him if he wanted to go back on it. That is what happened: I gave up my position and he took the position over, because I knew how keen he would be, if he was not to be the shadow minister for Aboriginal affairs, to be on that committee. I have to say that the Aboriginal affairs committee was not a highly sought-after committee in the parliament, yet Peter Nugent regarded it with great importance and enough importance for him to go back onto that committee when he got the opportunity.

I was proud to walk for reconciliation across the bridge in Sydney with him, with Carol and with a number of our colleagues. We felt like a few but happy band of coalition MPs that walked across the bridge in Sydney. We both flew from our respective cities to go to Sydney for that momentous day. I think Peter and Carol were very proud to be part of that walk across the bridge, because he believed very strongly in reconciliation. It was one of his lodestars: he believed very strongly in trying to do something for the welfare, health, education, housing and employment prospects of indigenous Australians. So he strongly supported the practical reconciliation policies of this government. But he also supported an apology for the stolen generation; he had lots to say about black deaths in custody when that was a major issue; and he opposed mandatory sentencing when that issue came up. I was proud to stand with him, as were a number of our colleagues, on that issue to do with mandatory sentencing.

One of the most testing times in politics for Peter Nugent was the native title debate. From 1993 to 1998 he took a keen part in the native title debate, always trying to get the government and the people to see it from the point of view not only of the practical effects of native title in the community but also that indigenous people held the land so dear that native title was something that should not be dismissed but should be embraced and made to work. He tried very hard to help to get native title to work so that all Australians could adopt it, accept it and move forward with it.

He was proud of his role in the area of foreign affairs, and he used the chairmanships of a number of committees to promote his interest in it. He was chairman of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Joint

Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade; he was chairman of the foreign affairs and trade committee of the coalition back bench—I was a member of that with him—he was chairman of the Amnesty International Parliamentary Group; and he was chairman of the Australia-China Parliamentary Friendship Group. He took great delight in telling me about how he always raised issues of human rights when he went to China.

He enjoyed being a burr under the saddle to the state of Israel because of his support for the Palestinian causes. He and I did not share the same view on that issue and it was always a great source of amusement to both of us that we would get arguing about the Middle East with Israel's position and the Palestinians' position. He really enjoyed niggling me about his trip to Israel and the Middle East, which the Minister for Financial Services and Regulation referred to earlier, about how he was going to lead it and how he was going with Leo McLeay and Anthony Albanese, because he knew that I thought it was a bad idea to go. He got great enjoyment out of being on a differing railway track from me on that issue, because we agreed on so many other things.

He was also a great advocate of human rights in East Timor, when it was unfashionable as well as when it was fashionable. He used to give speeches about East Timor and human rights. Going back for a long time when the official government policy was really not to talk about it if we could possibly help it—not our government policy but the policy going back 20 years—Peter Nugent did not adopt that position. He would always argue for human rights in East Timor and, when it became fashionable, I think he was delighted but bemused with the rapidity of people jumping on the bandwagon in debating issues about human rights in East Timor.

He was also very proud of the role he played in the party room and in the parliament. Just speaking for myself, I will miss him in the party room because I sat across the gangway from him and I used to enjoy his very precise, very correct speeches in the party room about issues that were important to him. He was very committed to protecting the disadvantaged in the community. He was committed to multiculturalism, and he argued about that in the party room. He advocated his causes. He did not just hold them; he actually went out there and advocated them. The party room is the opportunity in politics to try to move your party in the direction in which you want it to go. He was a committed Liberal, a small 'l' liberal and proud to be described as such. Whether he was described as a Whig or a Deakinite liberal or whatever it was, he was very proud of that fact. He tried always in those 11½ years in parliament to move the party towards that small 'l' liberal position and he used the party room to do so.

Trish Worth and I were in the chamber when he responded to Pauline Hanson. He did it with great passion. It was an opportunity, and he took it, to lay down some markers about his philosophical view of the direction in which Australia should go. What is perhaps not well known is that one of the reasons he joined the Liberal Party was that he wanted to promote multiculturalism as a policy of the Liberal Party. He spent his whole career fighting for the cause of multiculturalism within the Liberal Party.

He was also very proud of the fact that he was a great campaigner. He won Aston from Labor, he enjoyed beating Labor in the subsequent three elections and he was looking forward to beating Labor again at the end of the year in the general election. He got great glee out of the fact that at every election the Labor Party worked terribly hard in Aston because of its marginality. He liked the strategy and the toing-and-froing of the politics of winning a local seat, and he did it very well. He was a great model for many people because he was terribly local and terribly grass roots. Regardless of the standing of the party at any given time in the political cycle, the standing of Peter Nugent in his electorate was always particularly high. He was a very reliable person to have as a candidate in that sort of seat, because you could be sure that he would be winning or trying to win.

I will miss him. He was a great friend. We supported each other in many things. We voted for each other at every opportunity we had within the party. I will miss him for that as I will miss him for many other things. On behalf of Carolyn and me, I would like to pass on my condolences to Carol. Carol is the mother of twins and, in the last six months, she has been giving us sage advice about how to manage that issue of twins. I hope that that will continue. I look forward to continuing my friendship with Carol and I will miss a great friend in Peter Nugent.