



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

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Date Tuesday, 22 May 2001
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Questioner
Speaker Billson, Bruce, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (5.34 pm)—I rise tonight to briefly add my remarks to the condolence motion and to pass on my regards and Tina's to Carol and the family for the loss of a special man and a loved one in their lives. Peter was a very decent and honourable man, and someone I admired and respected a great deal and learnt a great deal from. He had been around, doing what we do here, much longer than many people here and he taught some of us, particularly in the class of 1996, how to make a contribution.

I particularly want to talk about his role in the party room. I learnt much from Peter about how to put a point and how to exhaust and exercise those internal processes—because above all, while he was a very independent thinker, he was a Liberal Party person to his bootstraps. He loved the party and he worked as a great team player and showed all of us that you can make a point and drive home something that you hold dear, within the structures of the party; and he exercised and exhausted those avenues, much to my respect and admiration. I remember the way that he brought about opportunities for all of us to make a contribution. I remember when he encouraged the Prime Minister to conduct a foreign affairs workshop where we did nothing else in a party room meeting but talk about ideas about foreign affairs and to inject that input into the government's agenda. That was another example of Peter's work.

Many people remember him as an intense, serious character. I have to tell you that I had a date with Peter Nugent for three hours every Tuesday when parliament was sitting. We have heard about the Muppets analogy and the commentary in the parliament. I was actually in Peter's neighbourhood in the party room, and he was an absolutely hysterically funny human being. He was constantly giving us his thoughts and input to that small group that sat around him—the member for Hindmarsh and the member for North Sydney; we were one seat removed from him in the party room—and his insights, the clarity of his thinking, his interjections and commentary on what was discussed in the party room showed a man of great intellect and also a man of great humour and someone who was extremely consistent. He was the one who would share with us the irony of someone's remarks in that particular party room meeting and contrast them with those made a number of months earlier. He was the guy that pointed out when there was a vacancy on the front bench—albeit a regrettable vacancy—and we would caucus to work out who got the brown nose award in those opening remarks in the party room, where praise was being heaped on the leader. We had a great time in the party room. It was a great opportunity to share ideas, and that is where I got to know Peter Nugent. Tina and I did not socialise to any great extent with Carol and him; but just spending that three hours in every party room meeting near him, actually sitting in front of him and taking in his thoughts on things, gave me a terrific insight into some of his thinking.

I just want to talk briefly, given that the time is limited and there are others that wish to speak. He was the father of Scoresby in this parliament. He has been on that for 10 years and, as the member for Deakin mentioned, that deserves to be recognised. For what it is worth, that high street road overpass has got 'Nugent Bridge' written all over it. We need to recognise his 10-year campaign there. It was quite funny. He was on that for a long time, and I think he used to enjoy occasionally winding up a couple of us—the newer chums on the block—to go and do all the hackwork and things like that. He was very stoic and statesmanlike, and we would organise a delegation to the Prime Minister. We would get all that organised, and Carol and I would probably tick-tack on timetables and things like that, but we knew that we had to lead with Peter, as the father of Scoresby, and he would be putting that point very wisely. They were good days. And that time on Mother's Day just a few weeks ago was a very special day, and I think that high street road overpass has got 'Nugent Bridge' written all over it. He stayed with that issue for 10 years, and I just want to briefly relate that with how humanitarianism was at his soul and heart and with how he respected the individual dignity of all people. He was always there on that subject and he was always being heard on that.

I think all of us in public life feel that those human rights issues are a part of what we are here to do, but some of us come forward when there is an event that strikes a chord with us or when there is an issue that concerns us. Peter Nugent never left that stage. He never needed a chord to be struck with him. He was always there on that issue. It did not require an event to prompt his input; he was always there. I would say that, for many of us, he

was in fact the chord. His comments at times prompted others to come forward and talk about human rights. He was the conscience of many others in that respect, and I admire him greatly for that.

My final comment is that I share his view that our time in this place is a rare opportunity to do some good for our nation and its people. Peter grasped that opportunity with both hands. He brought to his work the energy and enthusiasm of someone much younger. He brought the wisdom and insight of a travelled and worldly individual, and he brought the courage and drive of an individual of purpose and conviction. Peter Nugent was a good man. I learnt a lot from him. We respect him greatly. He was a member who did a lot of good things for his nation, and he took the opportunity of being a member of parliament very seriously and, boy, he used that time to great effect, and we are going to miss him. Carol, all the best to you and the family for the future.