



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Wran, The Hon. Neville, AC, QC

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 May 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 14 May 2014
Page 3814
Questioner
Speaker Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (11:21): 'Neville Wran, he's our man. He's got this great state moving.' That catchy, punchy election jingle was one of my earliest memories of politics in Australia. I was only four years old when the first Wran government was elected and, through my early years of schooling, I recall Neville Wran as this giant of New South Wales politics, this leader of our state that I, my family and my friends looked up to.

That jingle perfectly described Neville Wran as the leader of New South Wales. Neville was an archetypal Labor leader: born in poverty in Balmain in Sydney, educated at the local Nicholson Street primary school, receiving a scholarship to Fort Street High School with the opportunity to study Shakespeare and Donne. These opportunities of education that had in the past been restricted to the sons and daughters of working-class people were opened up to Neville Wran, and he excelled.

Neville was the personification of that great Labor value of educational opportunity. After finishing high school, he was accepted into the University of Sydney where he studied law. He graduated, became a solicitor and eventually a barrister and was admitted as a Queen's Counsel.

Neville was a hard worker. His street cunning and wit ensured that he always had his Tory adversaries' measure. Neville was a person who never forgot where he came from. His physical presence was felt in the Supreme Court in Phillip Street and the bear pit in Macquarie Street, but his mind was always on the streets of Balmain or Blacktown, Campbelltown or in the homes of those families that lived in Western Sydney.

His understanding, indeed his affinity for the struggles of the workers and their families made him a reformer—but a cautious reformer—a steady-as-she-goes pilot of change, able to read the play like no other, to know when to push change, to push for reform and always when to wait for the right moment, for the right time, to ask the people of New South Wales to accept progress in their state.

His common touch made him one of the most successful leaders of our time, and he changed New South Wales for the better. He made the people of New South Wales feel proud. He lifted the spirit of the state of New South Wales and he did that by his remarkable achievements as a leader of a reforming Labor government. He changed the way the people of New South Wales related to each other. He broke down some of those barriers. He was a great uniter in bringing together the people of New South Wales and lifting their spirits—appealing to a greater humanity, if you like. He did that by improving the rights of the marginalised, migrants, workers, women and people who were gay. He introduced the Anti-Discrimination Act. The first antidiscrimination board in Australia was established by his government. The Ethnic Affairs Commission was established by the Wran government. He created the first office for women. The first female solicitor-general and QC was appointed under the Wran government in Mary Gaudron. He appointed the state's first female minister of the crown. He undertook gay law reform to ensure that homosexuality was decriminalised in New South Wales, and his government introduced the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

These social reforms, which we see as part and parcel of a civilised Australia today, were bold reforms at the time, but Neville had the understanding of the Australian people and knew how to lead them down the path to a better New South Wales by introducing these reforms. He showed the people of New South Wales how to be better people and how we could work together for a greater humanity.

Neville understood the value of education. Being a scholarship student, he never forgot the fact that he had the opportunities in life that were provided by his foundation in education. In doing so, he founded the University of Western Sydney and established the Premier's Literary Awards. In health, he understood the value of ensuring that resources were available to population growth centres, throughout Sydney in particular, through his Beds to the West program. He had a great affinity for protection and conservation of our nation's natural environment and heritage, creating numerous national parks throughout New South Wales and establishing the Environment

Planning and Assessment Act, the Land and Environment Court, the Heritage Act, the Coastal Protection Act and the Historic Houses Trust.

His main aim was to create good well-paid jobs for the citizens of New South Wales. He understood the importance of a strong growing economy and its value in creating jobs for the people of his state. He modernised the railways. His government reformed the coal industry and introduced changes to energy generation in New South Wales that sustained the industry for decades to come. He understood the value of arts and culture to enriching people's lives and in that respect he did not believe that culture and the arts were something that should be confined to the higher echelons of New South Wales society. He took arts to the people—to the masses—by establishing the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta, the Campbelltown Gallery and the Powerhouse Museum. He extended the Art Gallery of New South Wales. His government extended the Australian Museum and the State Library, ensuring that the masses of people in New South Wales had access to arts and culture to enrich their lives.

As the member for Wentworth pointed out earlier, Neville Wran was a founding member of the Australian Republican Movement and a proud advocate for an Australian becoming our head of state. He understood the value of one of us being appointed as our head of state and the value that that would bring to Australian society and Australia's future. He worked hard as a founding member of the Australian Republican Movement and was a generous donor to the cause of an Australian republic.

I have very fond memories of Neville Wran as Premier of New South Wales. For me, he was an icon, a great leader and someone who will be sadly missed by the Labor community throughout Australia. I offer my condolences to Jill and his family. May he rest in peace.