



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Bannon, Mr John Charles, AO

SPEECH

Wednesday, 3 February 2016

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Questioner
Speaker Leigh, Andrew, MP

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Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (11:09): For those of us on the Labor side of the House, when we think about South Australian politics so often we think about Don Dunstan, that great social reformer who brought South Australia out of the 1950s and 1960s with a splash of sartorial flair and with an openness to social reforms that reflected the social change of the 1960s. Don Dunstan was a unique political figure and the social reforms he put in place in South Australia presaged much of what the Whitlam government did.

Yet often sitting in Dunstan's shadows is John Bannon, who did for the economic side of South Australia what Don Dunstan did for the social side. He was the longest-serving Labor Premier of South Australia, and during the entirety of his 10 years as Premier he also held the position of Treasurer—an extraordinary feat. Some of his more notable achievements in expanding the economic potential of South Australia include winning the Grand Prix for Adelaide, establishing Australia's submarine industry, developing the River Torrens bank as an events and tourism precinct, converting part of the Adelaide railway station into a convention centre and facilitating the establishment of the Olympic Dam copper and uranium mine in 1988—I should say after a not inconsiderable effort on John's part to change Labor Party policy.

Those achievements meant that he was responsible for a substantial increase in the economic base of South Australia and for a significant rebound in its economy after the moribund economic situation it had been in in the early 1980s. He also recognised the importance of reducing the state's debt. But sadly, his important economic legacy was tarnished by the State Bank of South Australia crisis, something that would be indelibly associated with the Bannon government but events over which the Bannon government had little control. He again displayed the perseverance for which he was so well known. Despite knowing that it would damage his own political career, John Bannon acted with diligence and integrity during the host of inquiries which would eventually exonerate him.

He might, as a Shakespeare enthusiast, have been tempted to languish in tragedy following his resignation, but instead he remained an enthusiastic, active and productive member of Australian society. He became a director of the ABC, completed a PhD in Australian political history at Flinders University, received an honorary doctorate in law and research and lectured as an academic. He contributed until the very last, briefing the Prime Minister on federalism and attending the Australia day-night cricket match at the new Adelaide Oval just days before his passing.

As a fellow political runner, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge John Bannon's extraordinary ability to combine marathon running with politics. He ran 28 Adelaide marathons, 11 of them in under three hours. I have got under three hours a couple of times but I will never get to John Bannon's pace. John's fastest marathon was two hours 44 minutes. That is a marathon pace which for part of the 20th century would have been the Australian record. He managed to maintain that personal discipline of getting out for a run whenever he could, and the grit and perseverance which is required to complete so many marathons at such a pace defined his political career. In a beautiful obituary in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Mark Kenny wrote:

Even now when I'm grinding out the kilometres in Canberra, I often rely on something John Bannon once confided about distance training. He said when your body wants to stop, you can always go a bit further, and you will be glad you made that choice.

This was a choice that John Bannon made in his running but also a choice that he made in his economic reforms. He always chose to go that extra kilometre, to put in that extra bit of effort. South Australia and Australia as a whole are better for his policy achievements, and all of us as parliamentarians can learn from his example of tenacity, effort and individual perseverance. I express my condolences to his family and acknowledge a fallen giant of Australian politics. John Bannon, rest in peace.