



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Kirner, Ms Joan Elizabeth, AC

SPEECH

Wednesday, 3 June 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 3 June 2015
Page 5834
Questioner
Speaker Ryan, Joanne, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (12:45): I am pleased to follow the member for Ballarat this morning—so very pleased. In the last conversation I had with the Hon. Joan Kirner AC, she told me that I reminded her of one Catherine King. I cannot think of a higher honour, and what a lovely moment it is to have to remember.

The Hon. Joan Kirner was honoured as a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2012 for eminent service to the parliament of Victoria and to the community through conservation initiatives, contributions to gender equality, the development of education and training programs, and the pursuit of civil rights and social inclusion. Joan's contribution to Victoria began much earlier than her political career. She was a community builder and a community advocate long before she entered parliament. As a teacher, she contributed. As a community activist, she contributed. As a parliamentarian, she made significant contributions in education and the environment. As a Premier, she broke a ceiling that was yet to be named.

And beyond politics her contribution continued. Of course, many have spoken about EMILY's List and Joan's role as a founding member and key driver and her role in introducing affirmative action into the Labor Party. Many have spoken on these. I want to speak more about her local influence, her contributions to the west of Melbourne, her insistence that social housing have a place in large developments like the Rifle Range estate, her leading the campaign to save the Williamstown rail line, her fighting to ensure the Yarraville Community Centre remained open and her being a founding patron of the Williamstown Literary Festival. She found a way to embed her values of social justice and equality and equity into the community through her influence over so, so many years.

There are so many women in the west that were supported by Joan. Much has been said about the support and friendship between my predecessor, our much loved and heralded former PM, the Hon. Julia Gillard, and the Hon. Joan Kirner. Theirs was a special relationship, a very special relationship. However, the reach of Joan Kirner went much wider, to Lynne Kosky, to Terry Bracks, to Jill Hennessy, to Nicola Roxon—all great women who have served and are serving the west—and to some of the men: Steve Bracks, Wade Noonan, Tim Watts and the member for Scullin, here today, Andrew Giles, who has spoken so fondly of the influence of Joan on his life. There are Hobsons Bay city councillors: Linelle Gibson, Angela Altair, Luba Grigorovitch and the current Mayor of Hobsons Bay, Colleen Gates. There are the staff of members of parliament, who make important contributions to Victoria and to the country—these women from the west: Rondah Rietveld, Michelle Fitzgerald, Lori Faraone, Hutch Hussein, Catherine Van Vliet and Kerry Lewis. All are mourning the loss of a great and dear friend. Her contribution was at every level. She was influential in the lives of those active on school councils—people like Cathy Danaher—the leaders in the community centres and the schoolteachers, the small business owners, the artistic and the disabled. Joan found ways to provide support.

And what did this mean? What were her actions that so influenced so many women? The most important thing that Joan Kirner did was hold a mirror up to women, and by her actions and her words she said to us: 'You already do this work. You work every day building community and making a contribution. You can lead.' She challenged us to take the next steps, to not demur but to become the president, the spokesperson, the change agent. And she did not just put out the challenge. She followed up with support and infrastructure. The obvious example is EMILY's List, but there are so many others—her work with Victorian communities, driving grassroots community development and support. Her beloved iPad in recent years provided a window to the world. So many speak of receiving links to interesting articles, encouraging emails when times were tough, supportive text messages with a witty word at just the right moment.

Joan had another passion, referred to by the member for Ballarat, and one that I share: the Essendon Football Club. Yesterday they acknowledged her contribution in their tweet:

She was about change ahead of change. She was about challenging the status quo.

Obviously, she was a great servant of the Essendon Football Club, and highly valued.

I was in a meeting when the news came that Joan Kirner had passed away. I was struck with overwhelming sadness that a bright mind, the brightest mind, had been quieted. But there was also relief that the pain she had endured so stoically was gone. That was typical of Joan. She had shown such resilience across her life, such determination, that her stoicism was not a surprise. But that fight was over. Joan Kirner, you worked to make lives better and fairer until the last.

I heard the member for Grayndler mention receiving an email from Joan so recently. There is another story of someone ringing Joan in hospital, trying to organise a visit to come and see her. On the other end of the phone, Joan said—and this is just days before her passing—'I have to check the work diary.' And that is typical of Joan Kirner.

Joan Kirner, you dragged us, pushed us, led us and danced with us. You bonded us to action, to appreciation, to understanding, to argument. You inspired us. You acted on our behalf and in our best interests. You took the job. You raised our aspirations. You lifted us up. Your commitment to fairness, to equity, to lifting us all up has been boundless. You taught us that we still had to fight.

I would like to conclude by thanking Ron and his family and to offer them my condolences and my deep thanks for sharing your wife, mother and grandmother with the rest of us for such a long time.