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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONDOLENCES

Randall, Mr Donald James

SPEECH

Monday, 10 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

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Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (15:26): In starting my contribution, could I firstly acknowledge Julie, Tess and Elliott Randall, and also Don's staff: Chloe Lawler, Claire Tegan and all of the Randall team that are here today. It must be really tough for all of you to sit here and listen to all of our wonderful tributes. You have been through such a tough time so far. I acknowledge your courage in being here today to listen to us and I thank you for being here to be part of this condolence motion. I know why you are here. Don would have wanted you to be here, and that is why you are here. I think the shock and disbelief that all of us felt as his colleagues is minimal compared to the shock and the loss you felt. I am so sorry you have had to go through this. None of us, as colleagues, would have wanted this, but for you, for your husband, father and brother, it is the last thing you would have wanted. I am so sorry for what you have had to go through and are yet to go through. I read this quote:

We understand death only after it has placed its hands on someone we love.

That is where you are now, and I am so sorry for you.

My mum was a war widow. She said goodbye to her husband as he got on a train. He went off to war and she never saw him again. One of the things that she lived with all of her life was the fact that she never got to say goodbye. I know that is something that you share Julie, Tess and Elliott and that you will find very, very difficult to come to terms with. It is so difficult when you say goodbye in the morning to someone you love and care about and they just do not walk back in the door. That is so difficult for you, and I feel so greatly for you in that space. It is a sense of unfinished business. I know how much he loved you, and I know that you love him. It is the same for Don's staff, his team. It is the same for you: your boss did not walk back in the door. It is an immense sense of loss. I know you have had support, but how can you replace Don Randall? You just can't. He was a unique character, and that is what we have heard from the tributes to him today on both sides of this place. He was a unique character, gone far too soon. We wanted him around because he was Don. That is the tough thing about this.

I was actually coming back from committee work in Tasmania—I was on a plane with the member for Makin, Tony Zappia—and we had come in from Hobart. When the plane landed in Melbourne there were messages on my phone and people ringing me, desperately. I will never forget it. It was such a sense of disbelief, sitting in the airport waiting for my next flight back to Perth. I want to thank Tony Zappia as well. He is also a good friend of Don's. He and I sat there together in an absolute state of disbelief. I know that is how all of my colleagues felt, in the same way that all of you would have felt the same.

We have heard so many wonderful stories of Don's life, and there are some wonderful things that you can keep—the fact that it was a life so well lived, in spite of its perhaps being shorter than we wanted. There was nothing that Don did not do his own way, and how wonderful that is. That is a wonderful legacy for him to leave behind for each one of you—an example and a legacy. He never wasted one moment of any day, whether it was for you, as his family, or for his constituents or his friends or for the causes that he felt so strongly about. We all know that tomorrow is guaranteed to no-one. Don, at the end of every day, could face the end of the day knowing that he had not wasted one moment of the day but had spent every moment on the people or causes that he cared most about. So, in spite of the fact that we have lost him so early, there is that sense that he never wasted a moment of his time either with you or with those that he cared so much about.

We have heard about the strong, the fearless, the irreverent—some of the characteristics that we loved so much about him. As an advocate for his electorate, he was second to none. It did not matter what level of government; we all knew, and so did some of our state colleagues as well, that Don did not discriminate. If someone needed to be dealt with, he dealt with them—and Chloe would attest to that very strongly. He did not suffer fools gladly either. If he thought you were out of line or he did not agree with you, Don would certainly tell you in a very forthright way, which is why you were never in any doubt. What a great attribute to have.

There was one thing Don learnt that he spoke to me about, and I think a number of our colleagues. He learnt very quickly, Julie, as you would remember, how quickly a member of parliament becomes yesterday's news the minute they are not the member, be it for Swan, Canning or whatever. We all know in this place, and we should remember, that it is the position that we hold in this place—as the member for Forrest, in my case, or the member for Canning in Don's case—that is so important and valued by the broader community, those that we deal with on a daily basis. I remember Don saying that the day after he was not elected his phone stopped ringing. There were people that he expected to hear from that he did not. He also learnt very quickly that as a member of parliament the reason to make the most of every single day is that the day after you are not the member the position goes on and the importance of the position goes on, but your role in that has changed. He learnt that very directly, and that is why he fought so hard. He not only knew what he had to offer; he had a sense of unfinished business at that time. So Don learnt an incredible, indelible message, and that is what he brought to the seat of Canning—an absolute gutsiness and a determination. He knew what it was like not to be the member and he knew he still had so much to offer. But he also knew that he needed to make the most of every day, because at any time, being such a marginal seat holder, it could have been Don's last day in that job. So he never, ever had anything to regret. I hope that brings you comfort, because Don had nothing to regret. In everything he did, he gave 110 per cent. There was nothing left on the table, in spite of the fact that we lost him so young. So I hope that is something that you can hang on to.

He was such a wonderful source of support. You need to know that in this place: yes, he was Don, but there were very marginal seat holders who learnt so much from him—and I am sure they are yet to speak. They learnt some of the simplest things: that people matter. We always knew with Don that people mattered. People mattered every day. So for marginal seat holders it was a very good lesson. If they wanted advice, not only would they come to people like me as a whip but they would also go to Don, because he worked the street. He worked his electorate and he knew about people. One of the things that I did after I heard of Don's passing was to call Bronwyn Bishop. You have heard Bronwyn speak. Don had an enormous respect for Bronwyn, as you know very well. He would have been devastated to see what has transpired here. He loved her very much and treated her beautifully. He always looked after her. You always saw Don looking after Bronwyn.

He died doing his job. That probably was overlooked so much in the media—that Don died doing his job. He was going to see and talk to people whom he cared about and wanted to hear from. He was desperately angry when the media turned their focus to you, as his family. He took that particularly badly, and I do not blame him. Because of the way he felt about you, the last thing he wanted was to see you having to deal with the issues that we as members of parliament deal with in full knowledge of what we bring on ourselves in a tough and relentless environment. But he felt it very, very personally when it was you. I have no doubt that you knew that.

One of the things I kept thinking was: I will not see Don at the airport. We will not share discussions about whatever is affecting our electorates, our state. He was a fierce and ferocious representative for Western Australia. He was also a great person to have at your side. If you were in a stoush, he would not just stand beside you; he would stand in front of you. How many people can you say that of? That is who Don was. He would stand in front of you. That 1D, 1Don, seat is very special. When I got on the plane, that is what I thought.

Don was with me in the Federation Chamber one day going back to 2009 when we heard some discussions about the school chaplaincy program. He and I were listening to what was coming from the other side of politics. It was about the potential that this was going to disappear. Don and I looked at each other and thought, 'We need to work really hard on this', which we did. We went to the minister. It was one of the things that Don and I worked very hard on together, and I am pleased to see that it has endured. It was something he felt very strongly about—the importance of that to the schools and the communities in his electorate.

I would like to finish my contribution here just to recognise that you, as his family, are showing enormous courage to be here and listen to all of us. Can I hope that the courage that you have shown today, and the support that you can and will receive from each other and your friends, helps to sustain you in what is yet ahead on a tough road? We understand what is ahead for you; we cannot share it in the same way, but we feel for you. I leave you with this to finish:

Before us great Death stands

Our fate held close within his quiet hands.

When with proud joy we lift Life's red wine

To drink deep of the mystic shining cup

And ecstasy through all our being leaps—

Death bows his head and weeps.

Thank you so much for being here to listen to us all. And in memory of Don—our colleague, our friend—may he rest in peace, but he knows that our thoughts go with him.