



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Randall, Mr Donald James**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 10 August 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ramsey, Rowan, MP

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**Question No.**

**Mr RAMSEY** (Grey) (16:41): This is a difficult day for all of us, right across this parliament, as we say goodbye to the great friend we had in Don Randall. I was part of the 'crew of 2007', as I think the Minister for Social Security referred to us earlier. There were only seven of us, I think, that year. It was the Rudd-slide, after all. Don was one of the first outside that group to offer me the hand of friendship. This can be a lonely place. So, for someone as affable as Don to come up and say, 'No, you're going to be on my table; we'll look after you, mate'—that is what he was like.

Over the years that we were here together, almost eight, he became a very good friend to both me and my wife, Teresa, normally making sure there was room at his table or organising either for a small group to slip out for dinner between 6.30 and eight o'clock or something less rushed on a Wednesday evening. A few people have referred to Don's predilection for a good red. He would normally leave you with the comment, 'Make sure you don't bring a lousy red.' He told me one day, quite candidly—and I thought this was a very good reading: 'I like South Australians; they normally bring good wine.' In fact, Don normally brought a South Australian wine. So be it.

He was passionate about his electorate and about politics, and a lot has been said about that today. Of course, he was the political comeback kid, having lost the seat of Swan after just one term, in 1998. But he was elected member of Canning in 2001, and, if he was not already a relentless campaigner, he became one then. He had spent a long time teaching, he had devoted much of his life to it and he had a great passion for it, but he confided to me, 'Having to go back to it, I hated it. I hated it. I wanted my job back here.' He said, 'I was determined to work to get it, and, once I'd won the seat, there was no way in the world I was going to lose it again.'

I was always interested in Don's opinion on lots of things. After all, he had the runs on the board. He was a member who had been here longer than me and was widely respected, and he had strong views on many issues and was not shy about telling them to us. Many of us in this place are involved in the parliamentary committee system, and most of us think we do pretty fair work in it. Don was normally not involved in the committee system. He would say, 'There are no votes here in Canberra,' with a bit of a growl, actually, as he headed back to his electorate.

In our party room—much has been said about that—he was a frequent speaker and he was listened to. I always admired the way he could put his finger on the issue. Sometimes he raised controversial issues; other times he raised issues that we all had been dealing with but had not had the foresight to raise in the party room. Don would say his piece and I would listen to him and say, 'Yeah, that's right.' After he sat down I would say, 'I wonder why I didn't raise that before Don did?' He just seemed to have a way of seeking out the issues that were cutting through with the public, the issues that were hurting us politically or the things that were helping us politically—he knew what was popular on the ground. He frequently spoke up about his electorate, and in particular about jobs for skilled people that could not seem to get on the starting blocks in the resources boom. He would frequently take it up with the resource companies and say, 'You are sourcing workers from all over Australia and from all over the world, and yet I have got people in my electorate with good skills that can't seem to get past the starting gate.' I think it is still a very relevant question, and Don was not scared who he put the question to.

I was part of a bilateral delegation to Sri Lanka in 2011—the first, as I understand, by an advanced Western nation since the cessation of hostilities in the 30-year civil war. Don was not on that delegation, but he was a great friend of Sri Lanka and a frequent visitor. He sought me out after that visit and drew me into the parliamentary friends of Sri Lanka group. While he acknowledged the brutality and the pain of the long civil war, he was of the opinion that that country, and Australia as a friend, needed to make the new Sri Lanka work as a modern, inclusive society as soon and as much as possible. Many others have spoken of his great love of Sri Lanka, and he believed what a great nation, what an important nation, Sri Lanka can become and how it can become a very inclusive democracy. So he was a great friend of Sri Lanka. He was also chair of the friends of Japan and Cuba, a country visited recently, and was keen to help as much as he could.

Others have spoken out about Clontarf. It was through Don that I met Gerard Neesham, the CEO of Clontarf and the original coach of the Dockers, and was caught up in at least a bit of the enthusiasm that Don and Gerard have for Clontarf. It is one of my great disappointments that we do not have the Clontarf program operating in South Australia. The South Australian government seems to be on another horse and have selected another way of trying to engage Indigenous kids. I think they have probably made an error and we are dealing with an inferior organisation, but it is my hope that sometime in the future that might change and I too can become as engaged in Clontarf as perhaps Don was. But he was a great champion of Clontarf and he made sure that Gerard had the right people to talk to when he came to Canberra.

He had a wide array of colourful friends—and I mean that in the widest term, not in the terms that are sometimes used in Sydney newspapers—and I remember one night with my wife and I, and a small other group, Don said, 'I've got some friends over from WA and I would like you to meet them. Why don't you come out?' We went out and I sat down with a gentleman called Johnny Miller. Johnny Miller was a jockey. I do not reckon I could name more than about five Melbourne Cup winners off the cuff, because I am not really a racing man, and I would be struggling to name most of the jockeys. I looked at Johnny Miller and I said, 'Galilee in the '66'. I think I went up in Johnny Miller's standing, probably not justifiably, but he was one of the very few I did know who rode the horse and I did know what year he won the cup. He was pretty impressed. He was a great raconteur; it was a good evening. While we were sitting there listening to the tales of Johnny Miller, we looked around the room and at the next table there was a fairly familiar looking face, and it was Normie Rowe. Well, before long the two tables had joined up and we had a very memorable night. It was just one of those things that happened when you were around Don. He was good with people; he was good at drawing people together.

In 2011 I was fortunate enough to participate in the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program, and we visited Afghanistan and the troops there on the ground. Don was on that trip with me and it was a place that I got to know him even better, even though—as many pointed out already in this condolence motion to Don—maybe I did not find out as much about him as I thought, because it seems that much more has been revealed about him in the last few weeks than we knew. But we shared a room together; in fact, we shared a shipping container together. We eyed each other off, wondering how loudly the other would snore. As it turned out, I think we made good company, because I do not think either of us kept the other awake. He was a wonderful travelling companion and, as always with Don, he was great for breaking the ice and encouraging people to tell us about what it was like for them to be serving in Afghanistan.

However, it will always be as an organiser of evening dinners in this place where I shall miss Don the most. He always made sure that, when time permitted, we got together, because he understood that it was important in this place that we support each other. He was a great lover of life and lived his life to the full. But my loss, and I will miss Don badly, and our loss, this parliament will miss him, will pale into significance of course to the loss of his family, that of Julie, Elliott and Tess—the loss of a partner, the loss of a husband, the loss of a father and the loss of a friend so unexpectedly, so early. Unless we have been through similar or the same circumstances, it is difficult for us to fully understand what they are dealing with at the moment.

I am given to reflect here. I attended a funeral a couple of months ago of a close friend who died prematurely. He had the opportunity, or the burden, of knowing for 12 months or more before he died that he was going to die, and he had a hand in writing his own obituary. It was a very moving piece. One of the things that Tuck my friend said and that he left us with, as he dealt with his illness, was: 'It is what it is.' I think that is a powerful phrase. For all of us who miss Don, it is what it is, but life goes on. We have to deal with a parliament without Don and his family have to deal with a family without Don—but we will, because that is what we do. We do front up the next day and get on with life. I pay tribute to a great friend and parliamentarian.