Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (20:59): Tonight I wish to speak about a very humble man: Senator Joe Ludwig. Coming from Longreach in Queensland, he has been a member of the Army Reserves. He was an industrial officer, a barrister and, most recently, a member of this place since mid-1999. Ever since he arrived here Joseph has worked quietly, conscientiously, forensically and fuelled by an excess of Jelly Babies and cups of Nescafe to successfully achieve significant reform, to make many friends and to contribute positively to the future of the men and women who work hard to make this country what it is.

Some of the people who know his work the best are his current and previous staff who have worked for him over the last 17 years. They call themselves Team Ludwig and have written this speech for Joseph, a senator who has achieved much in this place as manager of opposition and then government business in the Senate, Minister for Human Services, Special Minister of State and Cabinet Secretary, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery and a member of over 15 parliamentary committees.

I am told Joseph was a generous employer. It has been remarked in Queensland more than once that the single largest silent faction in the Australian Labor Party is former staff members of Joe's. The mark of a boss is the length of time a worker will stay and the means of their leaving. Staff members of Joseph's stayed for long periods of time and all left for bigger and better things, often at his own urging, always a with a view to furthering their careers. But Joseph had one rule: you never come back. He saw himself as a mentor and a guide, not as the pinnacle of someone else's career.

Having met and worked with his staff closely myself, I can tell you that there was not a more loyal crew than the people who worked for Joseph. There is a story—that may now be more legend than fact—of a particular round of budget discussions during a previous term of a Labor government. As these things often go, one unnamed minister tried to reprosecute an issue they had already discussed with Joe with the intent of changing the outcome in their favour. The staffer refused to be engaged against Joe's direction, despite the enticement of the intrigue that comes from such talk. The unnamed minister threw up his hands in a huff before adding, 'That's the problem with you Ludwig people: you're all too bloody loyal.' It was the greatest badge of pride amongst his staff. It was a sensibility of loyalty that stemmed not just from his union, the Australian Workers Union, and Army background but from his core.

In his meeting room is a five-painting series of the *Batavia* mutiny—and he still has it to this day—so, when staff from other offices or stakeholders met with Joseph, it was often with paintings of the unfortunate end of the mutineers behind his head. As he would say, they'd work you out in the end. Loyalty was expected, and in return he reciprocated in spades.

As we have heard, Joseph was critical in achieving sustainable policy reforms in each of his parliamentary and ministerial roles. His valedictory speech on Monday evening was an uncharacteristic reflection on his achievements. I can advise you it was done under great duress and his former staff pulled together to insist that it be given. Well done, gang. He did not seek or expect the limelight and was pleased for others when they achieved it. Senator Ludwig deserves credit for his role at the Labor Party national conference when the party amended its platforms to provide for the opportunity for all couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life to have their relationship officially recognised and for the Labor government to take action to eradicate the prolific discrimination against same-sex couples that existed in texts and social security laws at the time.

As the Minister for Human Services, he truly understood the potential of information technology in reforming service delivery without the need for a national identification card. Joseph quite literally knocked down the walls between government service providers and has a framed piece of plasterboard in his office to prove it. This is the work that will continue to have remarkable impacts on the lives of everyday Australians, as the work he started will continue for many years to come.
Joseph was a representative for the workers and for the bush. As minister for agriculture, his reforms in the live export trade have guaranteed a future for the trade. These were not popular reforms at the time, but they were necessary. In fact, these were landmark reforms, supported across the chamber and will remain in place for decades to come. This is the sophistication and utility of Joseph's work.

As minister assisting on Queensland floods recovery it is no exaggeration to say Joseph oversaw the rebuilding of half of Queensland following a series of natural disasters. More than 9,170 kilometres of Queensland's road network was affected. More than 4,700 kilometres of Queensland's rail network was affected. Four hundred and eleven Queensland schools were directly affected and in need of assistance. Joseph oversaw the national partnership agreement with the Queensland government and rebuilt these Queensland communities, providing more than $42 million in payments to affected individuals and families and more than $121 million in grants to small businesses, primary producers and not-for-profit organisations. At the time, he worked tirelessly behind the scenes to get this money out quickly and to where it was needed most.

I could go on for hours about our mate Joe Ludwig—and I intended to, but the whip has given me the hairy eyeball, and I'm very well aware that I don't have any more than 3½ minutes left!—so I would like to flick to further in my speech to what to me was a very important part as I read it in my office earlier.

He cared for his staff like an awkward father, often waiting until the end of a 16-hour day in a foreign country or until they were in a light aeroplane, atop a mountain or during backseat driver commentary between meetings—basically any place without clear escape—to ask questions about how his staff's personal lives were going and to give unsolicited advice about relationships, investments, weight, family and marriage and general sage advice to ameliorate the life choices they were making in order to work for him all their waking hours. It was an odd approach but one that appeared to work. He took a genuine interest in people's lives.

Joseph, your staff want to say thank you. Thanks for your policy nous, for your strategic mind, for your idiosyncrasies, for being someone that they could place their faith and trust in, and for being a man whose first instinct, after he had decided to notify the then Prime Minister of his resignation from cabinet, was to ask if his staff were okay with it and to then apologise for the disruption his decision would cause to their lives; a man who never demanded attention or flair but who has contributed positively to this country's parliament for 17 years; and a man whose staff—Simon, Michael, Merrick, Cherie, Anneke, James, Sarah, Ben, Cecilia, Elliott, Israel, Kieran, Stuart, Sean, Lydia, Brian, Katana, Melissa, Alistair, Nino, Mainaaz, Julie, Matthew, Jimmy, Stirling, Aaron, Teresa, Jacky, Peter, Stav, George, Samantha and Sam, among a great many others—will always call themselves Team Ludwig. 'Joseph, we will miss you, mate. We will miss you standing up in the chamber, pulling down your cufflinks on both cuffs, and filling the time limit no matter how much or how little you ever wanted to say.' That is from your staff, Joseph, and I was very proud to be asked to deliver that. I take on board the warning you gave me as you walked in: that, if I thought I was going to get away with this without retribution, I was wrong.

Joseph, on behalf of myself and your parliamentary colleagues, particularly on this side of the chamber, I cannot express enough words for the thanks that we want to pass on to you as a mentor to us—certainly not to Senator Conroy but to us—and a damn good mate. If we ever, in that true Australian Workers' Union tradition, knew what you were up to when you were doing it, I do not know if we would be so happy. But, Joseph, thank you, mate.

I want to take this opportunity in wrapping up to wish soon-to-be-former Senator Joe Ludwig and his lovely wife, Leanne—who will very soon be just plain Mr and Mrs Ludwig—all the very best in your life's journeys. I hope to see you in the West. There will be a spare bedroom at my place, and the boat will be fuelled up. May you have safe travels. Enjoy your retirement. Thank you.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson): Senator Ludwig, from me personally, I hope you enjoy more well-deserved time in the surf.