



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24 1981

CONDOLENCE MOTION SPEECH
FOR THE LATE HON. ERIC ROBINSON

On Wednesday 7 January, Honourable Members of this House were shocked to hear of the sudden and untimely death of Eric Robinson.

The loss to this nation, to this Parliament, to his friends and his colleagues, is a heavy one.

I move that this House expresses its deep regret at the death on 7 January 1981 of the Honourable Eric Laidlaw Robinson, a Member of this House for the Division of McPherson since 1972, a Minister of the Crown from 1975 to 1980, the President of the Queensland Division of the Liberal Party from 1968 to 1973; and places on record its appreciation of his influential and wide-ranging public service, and tenders its deepest sympathy to his widow and family.

Eric Robinson's time and energies were given up almost entirely to Parliamentary life, to the Ministry, to Party and community affairs. To an enormous extent, he lived his life for politics.

He did not keep his public career at arm's length from his private life. One thing that many Honourable Members will remember is the generous way in which he opened his home to his colleagues in politics. Whenever a venue was needed, his home was always available.

Eric was alert to the needs of the community. He sought to provide the kind of representation McPherson electors wanted. He represented them truly and well.

Eric was a strong Party man. He believed in the Liberal Party as a force for good in Australia, and devoted his energies to strengthening it in Queensland. He was President of the Liberal Party for five years in Queensland before he entered Parliament.

He believed in Liberalism above all else.

He believe strongly in the free enterprise system, and supported the containment of government expenditure. He knew that this was the right path to a better life for Australians.

He saw adherence to these principles as the foundation of progress in our community. In his own electorate, he was surrounded by the tremendous development and progress that can occur when the energy and initiative of people are mobilised by the opportunities freedom provides.

Eric Robinson will be remembered particularly for his role as a man who had a practical understanding of business. He was himself successful in business, after the responsibility for his family affairs had been thrust upon him at a young age. He built up his family's sporting goods business from a single outlet into a chain that extends up and down the Queensland coast.

As a result of this, he knew the needs of the business community. And he wished to help business to flourish throughout Australia.

The result of his efforts was that the business community often looked to him for a lead. He was always prepared to give that lead. The business community has been grateful for that, and its benefits have been widely felt in the community generally.

But Eric Robinson was not just a practical man. His pragmatic judgments were informed by deeply held convictions and principles. These principles underlay his day-to-day responses. He did his best to ensure that his principles were given practical expression.

We all know that Eric Robinson stood up strongly for his principles and convictions. He fought for them with determination. But there were many occasions when he was prepared to set aside his own personal feelings for the sake of what he saw as the greater good.

I did not agree with Eric on all things. This is well known, and it is not unusual in politics. But it would be right to say that our disagreements were more about means than about ends, about matters of judgment rather than matters of principles. And my differences with him did not diminish my respect for him nor for his contribution to the Liberal cause.

Eric was a man whose outward calm hid the strength of his feelings. Often it seemed that he was impervious to criticism, and that nothing could hurt him. But he felt things far more deeply than was understood by people who knew him only casually.

I value my knowledge of Eric Robinson, and of the things we did together. His untimely death is a reminder that public life can be very severe and demanding. The demands of a person's own conscience and sense of duty can be enormous. The strains of office, the strength of feeling, the pressures of time and the requirement for immediate action, make many demands and Eric extended himself to the full and beyond in meeting them.

Eric Robinson inspired loyalty and conviction, both among his own staff and among his public service advisers. He worked long and hard, but retained the capacity to enjoy life - a capacity which was appreciated by all his associates. We will miss him in this House, in our deliberations, and in the everyday contact of political life.

There is a further feature of Eric Robinson's life, which was the indispensable foundation of everything that he did. It was at the base of his entire accomplishment. He was totally and utterly devoted to his family. His love and loyalty to his wife, Narelle, together with her constant presence and support, gave to this man continuing strength and perspective in the atmosphere of Canberra politics. And in expressing our gratitude to Narelle Robinson for her contribution to her husband's public service, we express our deepest sympathy to her and her family at this time.