



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Councillor Mike Downie

SPEECH

Thursday, 30 September 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Thursday, 30 September 2010
Page 39
Questioner
Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP

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Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (4.44 pm)—It is with great sadness that my first speech in the 43rd Parliament should be to honour the life of my friend the late Michael John Downie. Mike's funeral was today and I wish I could have been there in person to honour his life and the wonderful contribution he made to his community and the state of Tasmania.

Mike was the mayor of my local Central Coast Council where I was a colleague from 1996 until my election to this place in 1998. Since then we have been great mates and he was a very positive and supportive influence on my life and career. He was also good for a laugh and a joke or three! Mike was a hugely popular mayor, a real leader, not just of his municipality but of the north-west region. Indeed, he was instrumental in urging municipal colleagues and significant others to rise above the elements of parochialism that had tended to hold the north-west region back for decades. Mike was a regionalist and he led a council that looked more broadly at issues beyond its municipal borders while never neglecting the municipality itself.

First elected to Penguin Council in 1979, Mike served in a variety of roles as councillor until the amalgamation of Penguin with the larger neighbouring municipality of Ulverstone to form the current Central Coast Council in 1993—indeed, my local municipality. Mike gained a reputation as an active, articulate and hardworking representative who knew his community and its varied issues very well and was greatly respected for it.

Mike was deputy mayor to the Hon. Sue Smith, the current President of the Tasmanian Legislative Council, from 1996 to 1998 and became mayor in 1998—a position held with great pride and distinction. I worked with Mike on council for a couple of years and there was no doubting his leadership qualities. He was in and around the various procedures and protocols that infuse local government administration everywhere and had an in-depth knowledge of local planning laws in particular. There was not much that got past Mike's radar.

He was also a passionate advocate for realising the infrastructure needs of his bailiwick. Indeed, you could say he was a very good nagger! Mike successfully got bipartisan political support, both Tasmanian and Commonwealth, for major projects such as the shared pathway between Turners Beach and Ulverstone, the

Ulverstone wharf redevelopment and recreation centre—and I had the honour of opening both of these—and the new Ulverstone Bridge across the beautiful Leven River. In fact Mike was lobbying me about his next project the very last time I saw him. Mike was one of the major architects of the Cradle Coast Authority, a somewhat uniquely structured body advocating regional issues and acting as a one-stop shop on a variety of matters shared by the participating councils.

Mike was able to operate and look within and beyond the square. Indeed, he could swim against the contemporary tide at times and was known to actually create a ripple or two of his own. On many occasions he was right to do so because Mike's rationale was quite simple: if it does not make common sense you can bet on more occasions than not that it should not happen at all. A tenacious advocate, Mike achieved the highest level of representation within the Tasmanian Local Government Association and in this role he was able to positively improve the provision of services and administration of local government in the state.

Mike loved his community but his greatest focus was his family and the real love of his life, Kath, whom he married in 1969. As I said and observed many times, Mike Downie loved his family and was greatly loved in return. When Mike became ill I was able to visit him at home on a couple of occasions and as we mulled over shared experiences several things struck me. The first was the demonstrable and loving relationship between Mike and Kath—equals in debate, life and love. The second was his love of family, with pictures of his children and grandchildren dotted around their welcoming home. Third was his determination to remain up to date with local, state and national affairs but most of all with his municipal responsibilities—the radar was just as sensitive and alert in sickness as it was in health. Fourth, he was a fanatical Collingwood supporter, and I suppose if one is to have a character flaw it may as well be a big one. No doubt Mike will be looking down again with lots of Saints to see how his beloved Magpies go on Saturday. Finally, I saw the badge that Mike would constantly wear wherever he went and on every official occasion: it was literally a smiley badge with a caption saying, 'Hello!' This typified the man—a man of genuine good humour, proud to meet and represent people and ever-keen to add a little sunshine and goodness to the lives of everyone.

May I pass on my sincerest condolences to Mike's loving wife, Kath; his children, Andrew, David, Michelle, Vanessa, and their partners; and to his greatly loved grandchildren. Rest in peace with our love and gratitude, Mike Downie. Yours was a life well lived, willingly served and greatly admired.