

HON ALEXANDER DONALD (DON) TAYLOR, AM

Condolence Motion

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier) [12.01 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Don Taylor, a former member of the Legislative Assembly for the electorate of Cockburn, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and extends deep condolences to his friends and family on their bereavement.

As we reflect upon Don’s remarkable journey, we extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones during this difficult time. I welcome those close to Don who are in the Speaker’s gallery today, particularly members of his family, Alex, Kim and Peter, his sons, and Mr Stuart Taylor, his grandson. Welcome to the Parliament today.

Don was a valued part of the Labor movement for 65 years. When I joined the Kwinana branch of the Labor Party in the 1980s, Don had already been there for several decades. I am proud to have called him not only a fellow branch member, but a friend and mentor.

Don was born in Kalgoorlie in 1928. His parents were Alexander Taylor, a shop assistant, and Lily Irene Jennings. Sadly, his father died when he was just two years old. He was raised by his mother and grandmother and was an avid listener when they shared stories from the old days in the goldfields. He went to Subiaco Primary School from 1933 to 1940, followed by high school at Perth Modern School between 1941 and 1944. At Perth Modern, he was a year ahead of Bob Hawke, who went on to become Australian Prime Minister, and John Wheeldon, who was a minister in the Whitlam Labor government. Unlike his alumni, Don did not immediately delve into the world of politics. Upon leaving school, he entered the workforce as a clerk, with Elder Smith and Company. That was a hands-on job in the shipping industry that honed his organisational skills, but it was in his basketball that he likely got his first experience with representation. As a skilled player, he represented Western Australia and the University of Western Australia throughout his younger years. He was around 19 years old when he spoke up as a delegate for his club. This caught the attention of the state secretary for basketball in Western Australia, who encouraged him to aspire to more senior roles. He went on to the management council, then the state executive, and then onwards to be a trustee.

In 1952, he married his wife, Elsie, or “Else”, as he would say. It is clear that she was an extremely patient and tolerant spouse, although, Madam Speaker, I am reliably assured that she was potentially more Labor than Don himself! Her patience was apparent particularly in the early days of his career, when, in addition to basketball and family duties, he also began studying teaching at night school at Claremont Teachers College and the University of Western Australia. In an interview recorded for the J.S. Batty Library of West Australian History, he said —

I will say this for my wife ... she’s been tremendously supportive of me all the way through; when I was going for my leaving at night school four nights a week, when I was doing my basketball on top of that, I was doing all these night meetings, when I was at university she would sit up with me to midnight or one or two o’clock in the morning and then correct my spelling and assignments. She said she knew it was all for both of us anyway, but never ever, ever made criticism and was very, very supportive. So I owe her. I don’t tell her often enough, but I do owe her.

It was at university that, at around the age of 28, Don became involved in politics. He joined the Labor Party in 1956 and began attending branch meetings, soaking up the political machinations that resulted in newspaper headlines. Don left teaching in 1962 to join the state government’s Rural Youth, travelling widely throughout the state, again soaking up experiences and learning as he went. After some encouragement, he sought preselection to run for Labor for the seat of Cockburn. He was successfully elected on 23 March 1968—the election that saw the Liberal–Country Party elected and Sir David Brand’s fourth and final term as Premier. Don won the seat of Cockburn with a safe margin of 18.6 per cent. At the 1971 state election, he increased his margin to 32 per cent, making Cockburn the safest seat in Western Australia. This was the election of the Tonkin Labor government, after 12 years of opposition. Don was made an inaugural minister, initially getting the portfolios of housing and labour. Shortly after, he was made the Minister for Labour; Prices Control; Consumer Protection; Tourism; Immigration. Then, in May 1973, when Herb Graham announced he was retiring, he was elected by caucus to be Deputy Premier.

Don’s achievements were many and varied. He advanced industrial safety and had a leading role in developing the workers compensation legislation. He was the Minister for Tourism when Western Australia famously transitioned its tourism slogan from “WA—the wildflower state”, to “WA—a state of excitement”. Members now know who was to blame! It sounds modest, but it was quite a radical change at the time. Frankly, these early steps opened the door for the domestic and international campaigns we see today.

Don also launched Western Australia into the minds of overseas and interstate tourists. He opened WA tourism offices in other states and promoted WA in Asia. But, for me, one of his greatest achievements was how he put

Kwinana on the map. From his inaugural speech in 1968, he was eager for Parliament to properly recognise the full potential of the Kwinana area, not just as an industrial zone, but as a great place to live. In his first term, he organised a caucus tour of Kwinana's oil and nickel refineries. For many, it was the first time they had seen an oil refinery or witnessed a blast furnace in action at the nickel refinery. Since his time in Parliament, Kwinana has absolutely boomed from a residential and industrial perspective. It will continue to have a big role in Australia's economy, particularly as our energy transition progresses. He never stopped fighting for the area. His enduring local advocacy was recognised by the City of Kwinana, which named him a freeman of the city. It is one of the many recognitions he received for his work. He was also made a Member of the Order of Australia, or AM, in the 1991 Australia Day honours for public service and service to the Western Australian Parliament.

Don retired from politics in 1984. He served around 16 and a half years in Parliament. Out of those 16 and a half years, he spent around 11 years in opposition. That is a tough job. When he was first elected, he sat in Parliament for Sir David Brand's final term as Premier. Some three years later, he served as a minister and as the Deputy Premier in John Tonkin's Labor government. After that, he sat through the entirety of Sir Charles Court's premiership for seven years and nine months. Eventually, when Labor won government again in 1983, he stayed on for around another 18 months. After political retirement, he served on the Judiciary and Parliamentary Salaries Tribunal from 1984 to 1986 and then was briefly a chairman of the Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons. From 1968 to 1990, Taylor served as the Administrator of the Territory of Christmas Island. After he retired, he continued to be an asset to the Labor Party and was always engaged and always helpful.

I am indebted to Don for not only his friendship, but also his mentorship. I remember in my first election seeing him work at the Medina Primary School booth and I gained huge comfort from his presence and his words to me at that time and during my time as the local member for Kwinana, which incorporated the seat of Cockburn at that time. I particularly remember when I first became Deputy Premier and had the opportunity to host former Labor Deputy Premiers at Parliament House for lunch. Obviously, there was Hon Mal Bryce, Hon Ian Taylor and Hon Don Taylor. It was wonderful to see the way he was respected and revered. Indeed, it was understood that through his quiet spoken words, he was a man of steely disposition and a great advocate for the Labor Party. As I said, his steely disposition in support of the Labor Party was perhaps only outdone by his wife, "Else". His family told me just now of the weekend when Else, aged 93 and a half years, took herself to the local polling booth where she was cross-examined by the officials there who said, "Do you know why you are here?" She said, "Absolutely!" They asked her, "Do you know how you are voting today?" She said, "Of course. I'm voting yes", as if to suggest that a woman of her advanced years would not have a clear sight of the principles and importance of the act that she was undertaking. I simply thank Don for his friendship and guidance over the years and acknowledge all who have had a role in his great career.

In closing, the Western Australian Parliament grieves the loss of a distinguished member who dedicated a lifetime to public service. Don Taylor was not only a longstanding member of the Labor Party, but also a steadfast advocate for the people of Western Australia. His unwavering commitment to his constituents and his tireless efforts to improve the lives of all Western Australians left an indelible mark on our great state. As an educator who invested in the youth of Western Australia, he leaves a lasting impact for generations to come. I would like to remember Don for not only his political achievements, but also his kindness, integrity and commitment to the values that make WA a great place to live.

May Don Taylor rest in peace and may his family find solace in the knowledge that his contributions to the state are appreciated by many.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [12.13 pm]: Today I rise as the Leader of the Opposition and of the Nationals WA to speak to this condolence motion on the passing of Hon Donald Taylor, AM. Born in Kalgoorlie and raised in Perth, Don Taylor's journey from educator to the seat of Cockburn in this Assembly illustrates his deep commitment to the Western Australian community. As Deputy Premier, he played a pivotal role in shaping the governance and the future of our great state. His diverse portfolios spanned housing and labour; prices control; consumer protection; tourism; and immigration, which speaks to the breadth of his capability and the trust placed in him by his colleagues. Beyond this house, his service continued in many and various roles, including as the Administrator of the Territory of Christmas Island and on the Judiciary and Parliamentary Salaries Tribunal. In recognition of his vast contributions, he was bestowed the Member of the Order of Australia in 1991, which was a fitting tribute to his dedication. I did not know Mr Taylor personally. Although our political paths may have been different, today we come together to acknowledge a life of immense commitment to public service and to extend our sympathies and condolences to his family, including those present.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [12.14 pm]: I rise to support the condolence motion moved by the Premier regarding the late Hon Don Taylor, AM. Don Taylor was a man of wisdom and kindness. He was a capable minister who served as Deputy Premier and, sadly, was the last surviving minister from the Tonkin government from 1971 to 1974.

Alexander Donald Taylor was born in Kalgoorlie in January 1928. His father was a shop assistant. He attended Subiaco Primary School from 1933 until 1940 and was evidently a bright student, as his secondary education occurred at Perth Modern School until 1944. Like so many young people of that era, he went straight into the workforce, and worked for the next 12 years as a shipping agent. Don Taylor attended night school in 1954 and in 1956 he studied at the University of Western Australia and Claremont Teachers College. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Teachers Certificate. He was president of the University of WA Education Students' Union in 1957 and was a university full blue for basketball, being a member of the state's men's team from 1952 to 1959 and then organising secretary of the Amateur Basketball Association of WA from 1959 to 1961. From 1959 to 1962, he taught at Applecross High School and then Perth Modern School. He joined the Australian Labor Party in 1956 and was active in the Fremantle electorate council, serving on Labor's state executive for 20 years after 1961. From 1963, he was the youth education extension officer with the Junior Farmers' Council and said in his 1968 inaugural speech —

... over the last five years I spent a lot of time travelling the State from one end to the other. I have worked with people in the country, I have had the privilege of milking cows, picking apples, cutting a little maize, throwing a few fleeces of wool, picking a few mallee roots, sitting on a harvester, and pushing a few bananas into crates in Carnarvon, and I have also had a run on a cotton-picker on the Ord.

Don Taylor was endorsed to contest the district of Cockburn at the 1968 election, which, at that time, extended south from Beaconsfield and included the localities of Hilton, Hamilton Hill, Spearwood, Coolbellup, Coogee, Jandakot and the entire Shire of Kwinana. He polled 68.6 per cent of the vote, with a majority of over 4 500 votes against his Liberal opponent. Over the next five elections, he was re-elected with even larger majorities, four times exceeding 70 per cent, culminating in 78.6 per cent in his final contest in 1983. Even in 1977 when the Liberal Party ran a far stronger campaign with George Grljusich, the well-known sports commentator, Don Taylor polled 67.5 per cent, which is a better than two to one majority. Cockburn may have been a safe Labor seat, but very evidently Don drew an additional personal vote.

In his inaugural speech from August 1968, he displayed his detailed and sympathetic knowledge of the Cockburn electorate, which was then projected to grow to a population of 130 000 in a local economy dominated by heavy industry. He noted that women comprised only five per cent of its workforce, creating a need for female employment so far from the inner suburbs. He was concerned at the prospect of a less educated workforce with a high turnover and lack of job opportunities for highly skilled employees. He highlighted planning decisions that resulted in the unfair resumption of properties and the alienation of coastal land from recreational use. He showed a characteristic avoidance of any trace of partisanship.

When the 1971 election gave the Australian Labor Party a one-seat majority, Don Taylor was selected as one of 12 ministers in the Tonkin cabinet—significantly younger than most of his colleagues and with only three years' parliamentary service, in an era when seniority carried much weight. From 1971 to 1973 he held the portfolios of labour, prices control, tourism and consumer protection, with briefer stints in housing and immigration.

In October 1973, with the resignation of Herb Graham, Don replaced him as Deputy Premier and Minister for Development and Decentralisation. After March 1974, in opposition, he ceded the deputy leadership of the ALP, but served until 1980 as a shadow minister in a range of portfolios, including local government, urban development, town planning, education and recreation. He continued as a member of the Rottnest Island Board and as an inaugural member of the Senate of Murdoch University until 1977.

In August 1984, Don Taylor resigned from Parliament and afterwards served until 1986 as a member of the Judiciary and Parliamentary Salaries Tribunal. Between 1986 and 1990, he was Administrator of the Territory of Christmas Island, engaging with the local people with his customary humanity. He was awarded the honour of Member of the Order of Australia in 1991 and was also recognised as a freeman of the Town of Kwinana. He lived in retirement in Myaree with his wife, Elsie, whom he married in 1952. To her and to Kay, Alex, Kim and Peter, and to their extended families, we express our condolences.

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) [12.21 pm]: Members, I, too, thank Don for his fantastic service to this state and to the people of Western Australia, and extend my condolences to Don's family and friends. I request that all members rise for one minute's silence in order to carry the motion.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.