

HON JOHN KOBELKE — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [9.45 pm]: I rise tonight to make a few comments about the passing of John Kobelke, because I am not sure that I will get another opportunity to say some words about this him in this house. The parliamentary biographers record for history the seats, the ministerial portfolios, the shadow positions and the parliamentary officer positions that he held. What they do not capture is the person. John was a problem-solver who despite holding significant portfolio and parliamentary offices, including for a time as Leader of the House, always found time to ensure that he personally followed up on constituent matters. It made him a great model for new members of Parliament, including this one. He was a faithful servant of the Labor Party who looked after his branches and made sure that they felt part of a Labor government. He had a work ethic pretty much bar none. He was an outstanding contributor to the Labor Party. He was a fantastic minister who in the Assembly was always able to stand and make a solid contribution when in opposition, to hold the government of the day to account, and when in government, to execute the government's policy position eloquently and effectively. He was deeply dedicated to his local community and in the time since he retired from Parliament, which was in part due to ill health, he remained active in his local community in a whole range of community positions.

He was absolutely dedicated to his family. I remember talking to him when my mother went into aged care and he talked about the fact that he regularly, if not every day during the parliamentary week, would drop in to visit his mother in a nursing home after Parliament rose, when it rose at a reasonable time during the day. Despite the day that he had had, he made that a priority. He was always willing to assist members of the Labor Party and he was always willing to assist MPs. He was responsible for designing much of our caucus's professional development program and he was responsible for providing direct training to MPs. Indeed, he assisted us after the 2017 election, with Jim McGinty, to transition into government to do all the kind of planning and implementation work that was required. He did all those things. He was a great local member, he was a great minister and he was a great supporter of the Labor Party.

Since we have been in government, he has assisted us in many ways, including me, by agreeing to take on the role of chairing the review into the Building and Construction Training Fund and Levy Collection Act. When I met with him to talk about my expectations of how that review would be conducted, as was John's wont, he was much more across the detail of what I was going to ask him to do than I was. He made a point of asking my position on section X of the act, and I had to think quickly about which provision he was talking about. His work ethic was such that long before he met with me, he had done the work to understand exactly the detail that would be required of him.

About three or four weeks ago, we got the message that he would no longer be able to continue as chair of that review because he was very unwell and unable to speak. I sent my best wishes to his wife, Stephanie, and his sons, who passed on the message. A week ago, we were advised by the Premier that John was very unwell and on Sunday we got the message that he had passed away. When it came, it came fast and quietly. He had made a deliberate decision not to publicise his ill health. He did not want to have lots of visitors and intrusion in what proved to be the last month or so of his life after he got the message out that he would be unable to continue with many of the things that he had wanted to do.

A measure of the man is the number of people who have expressed to me their sadness at his passing, which was way too soon, just a week short of his seventieth birthday. They include people such as Stanley from YouthCARE, whom many people will know well. Myriad others across the divide have expressed a view about him. I remember hearing the late Eoin Cameron talking about John Kobelke on ABC radio many years ago. He said that John was a thoroughly decent human being that everyone, on either side of the political divide, could respect because he was such a great man. For me, personally, he was always a fantastic mentor. There are these things in the Labor Party called factions. We were in different factions, but that meant nothing to John when it came to providing assistance to me as a new member and when I became a minister. From time to time, I bumped into him or I occasionally got a phone call or a text message, saying that he had heard me on the radio or seen something that I had done and wanted to give me some feedback, which was always positive, about what he had heard. He was, genuinely, one of nature's gentlemen and we are the poorer for his loss.