JAMES PHILIP McKIERNAN — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [9.45 pm]: It is with great sadness that I rise this evening to say goodbye to a friend, a comrade and a mentor, James Philip McKiernan. Jim was born in Cavan on 11 October 1944. He was the third of eight children and had a difficult time growing up because his dad sustained an injury and for a time the family was destitute. At 16, he moved to England to follow his brother and sister and while he was there, he did an apprenticeship and qualified as a first-class machinist. He married his first wife, Jean, in 1966 and moved to Perth, Australia, in 1969. In Australia he worked as a machinist/fitter and turner and he began working with the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union in 1976, which would later become the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, where he would work until his election to the Senate in 1984.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jim held a number of senior positions in the Labor Party. He was elected to the Senate in 1984, taking his position in 1985, and was re-elected in 1987, 1990 and 1996. Just before he entered the Senate, he married Jackie Watkins, who was the member for Wanneroo from 1983 to 1989 and the member for Joondalup from 1989 to 1993 in state Parliament. Being a migrant, Jim advocated for expanding Australia's migrant policy and played a key role as the chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration and the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committees of the Senate over a period.

Jim played a key role in Perth's Irish community over the years. He was a long-time 30-year member of the Irish Club. He also joined the Australian Irish Heritage Association of WA shortly after it was established and was an active member for many years, especially as a member of its fundraising arm. He was also a proud member of the Canberra Irish Club, was involved in the Irish–Australian business association in Melbourne and was a regular guest at Australia's biggest St Patrick event at the Lansdowne Club St Patrick Day's lunch in Sydney. In 1991, it was Jim's work with the Australian–Irish community that got him recognised in a very public way when the Irish National Association of New South Wales nominated him as their Irish Australian of the Year. He was deeply humbled and honoured to receive the award, which was presented to him at a gala dinner hosted by the Premier of New South Wales at Parliament House in Sydney. The award took him by complete surprise, and he was lost for words when asked to respond to the kind words that were said about him. Paul Keating had been a previous holder of the award and the late, great Dublin and Melbourne footballer Jim Stynes followed Jim as Irish Australian of the Year in 1992.

Over the years, he played a strong role in the Australian and the Western Australian Irish community. An avowed republican, Jim campaigned for the removal of references to the Queen in the oath or affirmation made by new Australian citizens. He tabled 28 petitions in the Senate between 1992 and 1993, and the passage of the Australian Citizenship Amendment Bill 1993 brought the campaign to a successful conclusion. Jim was also a very strong Bob Hawke supporter and critic of Paul Keating in federal Labor's leadership ballots in 1991. This support and loyalty probably ended up hampering his future career in the Parliament.

Jim was very passionate about the peace process in Ireland. Following the referenda in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland in May 1998, Jim proposed a motion in the Senate noting and welcoming the people's endorsement of the Good Friday Agreement and he paid tribute to the negotiators and the parties who signed the agreement. The motion, which was agreed to without dissent, is a tribute to Jim's negotiating skills. A backbench member of the then opposition, he was able to convince the government, his own Labor Party colleagues, as well as the third parties and Independents, of the merit of the resolution. Given some of us have to deal with those circumstances every day, it is no mean feat. This was an unusual event in a highly combative and divided chamber. Jim also helped to found the Australia/Ireland Parliamentary Friendship Group during his first year in the Senate and remained a member until his retirement.

It was my pleasure to work for Jim in his last four years in the Senate. I was just starting off my political journey and Jim was heading towards the end of his time. I was a fairly fiery red-haired student straight out of student politics, and I now know that I had probably far too much passion and plenty to learn. Certainly, from the outset Jim was very generous with his time. He took me under his wing, as he did with many others during his time in the Senate. Over the years, Jim employed a number of people who went on to serve as members of Parliament and also as cabinet ministers. For me, my time in Jim's office was when I grew up politically. I learnt from his passion and dedication to political causes. I have to say that over time our causes became his causes. He was a quintessential Irish person, and like many others who had to leave the country to find a better life, he was very proud of Ireland, very proud of her people and very proud of her causes.

Jim was respected the world over and just prior to his retirement from Parliament he and Jackie made a farewell visit to Ireland. During this visit, they were invited to Áras an Uachtaráin—the President's house—to be personally

thanked by President Mary McAleese for the work he had done for Ireland–Australia relations and the Irish community in Australia. The then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, invited Jim to his office to express his appreciation and the Ceann Comhairle of the Dail—the Speaker—Séamus Pattison and government ministers paid tribute to Jim's work. Since Jim's passing, a number of Irish leaders have sent messages of support to the family. Former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, TD, has expressed his sincere condolences to the family. According to my notes, he said —

> "I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of long-time friend of Ireland, trade union activist and leader, and former Labor Senator Jim McKiernan.
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> "The links between Ireland and Australia are old and enduring. During my visits to Australia, I had the privilege of meeting many Irish–Australians. Some were newly arrived. Others were among the one in three Australian citizens who can trace their ancestry back to Ireland.
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> "Jim McKiernan was one of the many Irish who emigrated to Australia in search of a new life. He moved to Perth in Western Australia … where he found work in the shipyards in Fremantle. Like many Irish workers, he was a staunch trade unionist and later joined the Australian Labor Party. In 1984, he was elected to the Australia Senate where he remained until his retirement in 2002.
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> "I had the pleasure of meeting Jim and his wife Jackie on my two visits to Australia … Jim also hosted Martin McGuinness during one of his visits to Australia, as well as working with other Sinn Féin representatives during their time in Australia. He was proud of his roots and very supportive of Sinn Féin's efforts to advance the peace process and Irish unity.

The President of Ireland, Mr Michael D. Higgins, whom many of us met late last year, also corresponded with the family following Jim's passing. In a letter to Jim's son Steven, President Higgins said that he heard the news with great sadness. He said —

> I had the pleasure of meeting your late father in Perth during my visit there last year. His life, his commitment to justice, his courage and his internationalism represented something that can only be described as Ireland and Australia at their best.
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> To overcome the obstacles he overcame would be a wonderful achievement in itself but even far greater was his lifetime commitment to removing all those obstacles for the benefit of humanity.

On behalf of the people of Ireland, the President offered his sincere sympathies on the great loss. He finished with "Síocháin síoraí d' a anam uasal." Everlasting peace to his noble soul.

Jim left a lasting mark on the trade union movement, the Australian Labor Party and also the Irish community. I want to extend my condolences to his wife, Jackie; his children, Steven, Jimmy, Donna, Lisa, Kim, Kate and Ben; their partners; as well as Jim's 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He was certainly much loved by his family. It was great to be a part of his funeral service yesterday. May he rest in peace.

Statement

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [9.55 pm]: I could not get to Jim McKiernan's funeral yesterday, so I want to place my appreciation of him on the record.

I was the first redhead he employed when he was first elected to the Senate in 1984. He employed two redheads, Stella Files and myself, and I think he probably regretted it for the rest of the time that we were with him, because between us we kept him pretty well organised. He had Jackie at home and Stella and I in the office, and I think he felt slightly overwhelmed. This was so long ago that we were in Old Parliament House. I can remember typing his first speech in Old Parliament House. I would have to type out a whole copy of the speech, he would make the changes he wanted to make and we would have to type it again with the changes. I appreciate the opportunity that he gave me to start my political career in Western Australia when I had returned after some time in Melbourne. He was a fantastic employer, a very generous man and I am forever grateful for the opportunities that he gave me. I send my best wishes to Jackie, all his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I know that they will read *Hansard* tonight. They have a lot to be proud of.

Statement

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [9.57 pm]: Like Hon Sue Ellery, I was not able to attend Jim's funeral yesterday. I knew Jim throughout the 1980s; we were on the Perth council together. We often had some very robust debates, but certainly Jim is a great person and a really passionate Labor advocate. Hon Stephen Dawson set out extremely well Jim's contribution, but

I want to make a reflection on the work that he did post-retirement. The work that he did for the Irish–Australian community was really extraordinary. He would give assistance particularly to young Irish people who had come here in very great numbers over the last 15 years. Often they would find themselves in difficulty and occasionally there would be fatalities, and Jim and Jackie were there providing the most extraordinary level of assistance to the more recent diaspora. I did not know Jim's broader family, but I want to comment on the nature of the relationship between Jim and Jackie. It really was an extraordinary partnership. They shared a political commitment, a passion for working with the Irish community and basically being good and active citizens. At the same time, they ensured that they enjoyed life and made it something that is joyous and to be celebrated. Vale Jim.

Statement

HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.59 pm]: I want to add my condolences to Jackie and the whole McKiernan clan. I also had the honour and privilege of knowing Jim on a short-term basis, working for him, with the support of Hon Stephen Dawson, I might say. I certainly learnt significant items from Jim and from Jackie over the years. I have valued both their counsel and their support. I know that Jim will be missed greatly by his extended family and also by his family in the Labor Party. May he rest in peace.

Statement by President

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Kate Doust): Before I give the call to Hon Charles Smith, I just want to add my words of condolence on the passing of the former Senator Jim McKiernan and pass on my condolences to Jackie McKiernan and the broader McKiernan family.