



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

CONDOLENCES

Newman, Hon. Jocelyn Margaret, AO

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Colbeck, Sen Richard

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Senator COLBECK (Tasmania) (16:30): I too rise to make a contribution in recognition of the life of my immediate predecessor in my first incarnation in this place in 2002, the Hon. Jocelyn Newman, AO. Jocelyn was part of a family that enjoys a very special place in Tasmanian and national politics, particularly the Liberal Party of Tasmania. Jocelyn's husband, as has been mentioned before, Kevin, won that famous by-election in Bass in 1975, which then set the tone for the political events of the immediate future, and it's one of those times that is recalled by many in national politics, regardless of which side of politics you come from, to be frank. I also had the opportunity, as state president of the party, to work with Jocelyn when she was the Prime Minister's representative on the state executive. She had an uncanny capacity to manage the vagaries of the internal politics of the party and even to put those of us who she thought were playing up a bit back into our places, with that formidable determination that's been described so many times so far today.

Following Kevin's retirement from the parliament, Jocelyn went on to establish her own very special place in political history, quite independent of Kevin, although not without Kevin. As has been noted, she was certainly an important part of the team when he was a member of parliament, and he was an important part of the team when she was a member of parliament, and to work together with them on the campaign trail was great fun. There is quite a famous story of one of the Tasmanian Liberal Senate team tours travelling in the north, I think heading towards George Town, when Jocelyn was allegedly the navigator and former President Paul Calvert was the driver waiting for instructions. They were supposed to negotiate a turn-off, but, without any instruction from the alleged navigator, Paul kept on driving straight ahead. That was followed by a negotiation as to how they actually got to the destination, which, as you could imagine, was quite amusing.

Jocelyn's time in the parliament brought many highlights, which have been mentioned already, so they don't need to be repeated. But my recollection of her time—in particular, when she was working on those significant reforms that she brought into place around the social security framework that exists now—was her appearing on what was then a pretty difficult gig on the 7.30 program on the ABC. She was being questioned closely and quite forensically about the reforms and what they might bring. I think Senator Payne's description of that steely gaze probably best describes the way that she dealt with that interview. There was no turning back. There was no deviation from where she was heading with that reform. That interview, as difficult it was, was dealt with with the typical aplomb that Jocelyn brought, because she was so well across her brief that no media interview, no matter how difficult, was going to detract her from or move her off the path.

She was, as has been described, a powerful advocate for Tasmania and also in her portfolios. As has been noted by a number of people, she could only be regarded as an exemplary example for women seeking and conducting a role in public life. The fact, as has been noted before, that she beat a field of 12 guys in 1986 to win preselection—including Senator Abetz, I might add—is a testament to that. And she wasn't expected to win; I think that's another point worth noting.

I think 'formidable' is an apt description for Jocelyn. Yet, formidable as she was, she had the warmth and the character to be one of those rare individuals able to make every single person in a room feel as though she were talking just to them. It's not something that I've seen in many people at all.

She received a very fitting send off at her state funeral. She was a remarkable Australian, and one I'm proud to call a friend. I extend my sincerest condolences to Campbell, Kate, her grandchildren and their extended family.