

## Legislative Council

Tuesday, 7 August 1984

**THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (Hon. D. J. Wordsworth) took the Chair at 4.30 p.m., and read prayers.

### THE LATE HON. W. G. ATKINSON

#### *Condolence Motion*

**HON. D. K. DANS** (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [4.31 p.m.]: I move, without notice—

That this House expresses its deep regret at the sudden and unexpected death on Saturday, 4 August, of the member for Central Province, the Hon. William Gordon Atkinson; records for posterity its appreciation of the public service he has rendered Western Australia; and tenders its profound sympathy to his wife, Mrs Olwen Atkinson, their four children, Robert, Nanno, Harry and Angela, and the members of his family in their bereavement.

I am sure that all members were as shocked and saddened as I was to learn of the untimely death on Saturday of our friend and colleague. Although he was one of the relative newcomers to the Parliament, having entered following the State election last year, he rapidly made friends on both sides of the House.

Although he was a new member, he had already made a strong contribution to Parliament because he was active in his ambition to help to achieve a better future for our State and its people. I and other members who knew him, are in general agreement that he was an outstanding representative of his community.

The deep sympathy of the Parliament will extend beyond those family members who grieve his death to the wider community of his home town of Dalwallinu where he was an active and respected member of the district community.

Gordon lived in the Dalwallinu district from his childhood days in the late 1940s. He attended school in Dalwallinu and, later, attended Northam High School before becoming an honours graduate and dux of Muresk Agricultural College—an early indication of the ability he had to rise above his peers.

He was always fit and an enthusiastic sportsman, both as a participant and supporter. He played in a number of country week hockey sides, was an active tennis and squash player, and

counted skindiving and fishing among his recreations.

He was actively involved in the local agricultural society in Dalwallinu and was for many years a councillor of the Royal Agricultural Society. He was also actively involved in his community in supporting the provision of new sports facilities, including the squash courts in Dalwallinu.

His enthusiasm for life was apparent from his broad spread of interests, interests which were, in recent times, extended to include his beginning to train as a pilot.

It is a matter of the deepest regret that a man such as Gordon should die in his prime when he had already extended so much of himself to those around him, and when he had the obvious courage and determination to continue to make his mark, and to help his fellow Western Australians at the same time.

Gordon's death will be deeply mourned by all members of Parliament, who, collectively and individually, will wish to join with me in extending their sincere and deepest sympathy to his family, to his many close and personal friends, and to the hundreds of people whom he has helped, and who thought highly of him.

**HON. G. E. MASTERS** (West—Leader of the Opposition) [4.34 p.m.]: I second the motion moved by the Leader of the House. I express my very deep sorrow at the passing of our colleague, Hon. Gordon Atkinson. He served in this House for only 15 months, but in that time he certainly built up a reputation as a member of great integrity and sincerity. He served the people whom he represented very well, and he served them with determination and with vigour.

I do not think any other person in Parliament typified the country people and the farming community better than did Gordon Atkinson. Undoubtedly, he would have gone from success to success. I have no doubt in my mind that one day he would have become a Minister in this House. He was already making a mark in debate with carefully researched work. His speeches were full of good sense and he made them with great frankness.

His sporting achievements have been referred to by the Leader of the House. We know that he was a sportsman of some distinction.

In relation to his academic qualifications, he achieved great distinction at Muresk Agricultural College during his school life, and that success followed him into this House.

He was a person one could not help liking and a good friend and colleague to all of us. His passing has had a tremendous impact on members and certainly on me. I cannot believe it. To his wife Olwen, to his children Robert, Nanno, Harry, and Angela, and to all his family, we, the members of the Legislative Council and his colleagues and friends, express our deepest sympathy on their sad loss.

**HON. PETER DOWDING** (North—Minister for Planning) [4.36 p.m.]: I join in the expressions of sympathy and follow on from the remarks made by the Leader of the Government in this House.

I have been associated with the Atkinson family since 1961 when I was a contemporary of Gordon's brother, Roger. I knew the family well. It is a fact that Gordon, like the rest of his family, was highly intelligent. All members of his family have diverse intellectual achievements of the highest order. Gordon showed, in a confident way, his ability to master those arts we practise in this place.

I share the sense of shock which is occasioned by his passing. I join in the expressions of sympathy to his wife and his children, to his mother and father, to his brothers and sisters, and to his colleagues.

**HON. H. W. GAYFER** (Central) [4.37 p.m.]: With all my colleagues assembled in this place, I mourn the passing of my co-member, the member for Central Province, Hon. Gordon Atkinson, MLC. Gordon Atkinson had a will to succeed. He did just that, in every walk of life in which he participated. I have no doubt that, if spared, he would have achieved great heights in this place.

I offer my sincere sympathy to his wife, Olwen, and their children, and to his mother and father, Mr and Mrs Bill Atkinson, and their family in Dalwallinu.

**HON. P. H. LOCKYER** (Lower North) [4.40 p.m.]: I want to be associated with this motion because I do not think anything has affected me more in the past years than has the passing of Gordon Atkinson. I have known him since the late 1960s because of an association close to my home town of Mt. Magnet. Tom Knight and I were closely associated with Gordon following his election to Parliament. Hon. Gordon Atkinson was a very fit person. As some members would be aware, Tom and I went to the gymnasium every night during the dinner break rather than go to dinner. We have been doing that for the past three or four years, and Gordon Atkinson joined us very soon after he became a member of Parliament.

There were very few occasions on which he did not join us. He was a fine example of a fit person and that is why the shock is so deep.

I took him into my electorate as a friend on several occasions, and he recently stayed with me on his return from a fishing trip to Onslow. He liked recreation and enjoyed visiting the picnic race meeting at Landor. One week ago, he made arrangements for him and his family to share a camp with me and my family. His death has been a great shock.

Gordon had a very pleasant personality and did not make many enemies. One could count them on one hand and in this place it is easy to make enemies. His personality was such that he represented his people 110 per cent, if that is possible. He was a man of his word and it is questionable sometimes whether that can be said of politicians. However, he always stuck to his word and will be remembered for it.

His wife and four children are in a state of shock and only their friends and their faith will help them to overcome the shock in time. His father, Bill, and mother will have to reassess their whole lives because of the passing of their oldest son who chose farming as his profession, as well as politics.

I know the whole district will turn out to honour its member of Parliament. I think the Parliament will be a poorer place for the passing of Gordon Atkinson.

**HON. TOM KNIGHT** (South) [4.42 p.m.]: I say very humbly that to have known Gordon Atkinson was a pleasure I will long remember. As Hon. Phil Lockyer said, we were extremely closely associated with Gordon, we attended many functions together, and we shared our trips to the Atrium health club during dinner breaks. He was one of the last persons to whom one would have expected this to happen. He was so fit, ready for everything, and keen in his approach to life. When I was telephoned on Sunday morning, I was deeply shocked to learn what had happened.

As the Leader of the House said, Gordon was halfway through obtaining a pilot's licence. In order to obtain a licence, it is necessary to undergo a strict medical examination for fitness because of the danger of one's being taken ill while flying. Gordon Atkinson undertook his flying training with keenness and a determination to succeed. He was doing just that in his work in the House and in everything he attempted.

I would like my thoughts recorded on this sad occasion, and my sincere condolence passed to Olwen and to the entire family.

**HON. W. N. STRETCH** (Lower Central) [4.44 p.m.]: I wish to speak to the condolence motion on the untimely and desperately sad death of our friend and colleague, Hon. W. G. Atkinson.

Gordon and I entered Parliament on the same day and we shared an office in this building. Words, however eloquent, can never fully express the deep shock and loss occasioned by the passing of such a fine, fit, and gentlemanly parliamentarian. In the short time he was among us, he made a great impression on this House. His wide knowledge of his electorate and his wealth of experience in agricultural industries were well demonstrated by his speeches in this Chamber. His background fitted him adequately to serve his electorate. He was a real son of the northern wheatbelt and was educated at Northam High School. He proved his academic ability by finishing as dux of Muresk Agricultural College. Needless to say, being Gordon, he graduated with honours.

Following his graduation, he gave devoted service to the community in every way he possibly could, and this ultimately resulted in his becoming a member of Parliament for his electorate. He was a hardworking person of great enthusiasm and great integrity. His effectiveness could be seen from the rapid increase in his workload, and as his office mate, I can bear witness to that. He will be sadly mourned and greatly missed in his electorate.

Gordon's was not the flamboyant style of politics. His style involved his getting around in his electorate, mixing with people, getting close to their problems, doing his homework, and achieving results in a quiet and effective manner. We meet many people on this road of life, but I am sure we shall never meet a finer person than Gordon.

I spoke to people at Muresk Agricultural College earlier today and I was told that Gordon's final report from his principal described him as a good, conscientious student, and a fine, all-round sportsman. That just about says it all.

I, too, express my sympathy to Olwen, their children, and his parents. I, too, mourn him deeply, but am extremely thankful to have known him in this place.

**HON. I. G. PRATT** (Lower West) [4.47 p.m.]: I wish to be associated with this motion of condolence. To my mind, Gordon was a home-town boy. We both come from the significant district of the

Dalwallinu Shire. Gordon attended Northam High School as did I, although he was some years behind me and, therefore, we did not attend at the same time. A significant number of members of State and Federal Parliaments have come from the Dalwallinu district. Once one has lived in that community, one always regards it as home. When driving along the highway into the area, one gets a feeling that one is going home. That feeling is shared by those of us who have entered this Parliament and who have spent so many years in that community. I refer to other members of Parliament who have come from that area: Ray Jones, Neil McNeill, Cyril Rushton—still a member of the Legislative Assembly—Ray McPharlin, and John Hyde, a Federal member. Of course, Gordon was the youngest to come from the district and the most recent. It is tragic that he had such a short time in which to represent the community, including the broader community of this province. He was an outstanding young man and I had the privilege of sitting next to him during his time in Parliament. I had long conversations with him on matters of personal interest to both of us and in future I shall miss his contributions to those discussions.

I am sure Gordon was a representative of whom Dalwallinu could be proud and, indeed, the rest of us from that community would be proud of such a representative. I am sure that others who come to this Parliament from his home district would want to be associated with my few words indicating that we are proud of Gordon and that we shall miss the contribution he would undoubtedly have made in this place.

**THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (Hon. D. J. Wordsworth): Before asking members to stand as a mark of respect, I rise to speak to the motion in order that our President (Hon. Clive Griffiths) might be associated with it. As members will be aware, the President is away representing this Parliament at the opening of the new Parliament House in Papua New Guinea. I know he was greatly saddened by the death of one of our youngest and most promising members, Hon. Gordon Atkinson.

Gordon was a member of this Chamber for some 15 months only, yet, in that short time, he established himself as a great contributor and an able speaker. He was quick to represent his constituents, regardless of their politics, and the House was never left in any doubt as to the effect of the drought on the economy, on the primary producers, and on country people.

Gordon Atkinson was a concerned member and one not frightened to work. He will be sadly missed by his friends in this Parliament.

I join others in extending condolence to his wife, Olwen, his four children, his family, and his friends.

**Question passed, members standing.**

**ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE: SPECIAL**

**HON. D. K. DANS** (South Metropolitan—Leader of the House) [4.51 p.m.]: I move—

That the House at its rising adjourn until 2.15 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

**Question put and passed.**

*House adjourned at 4.52 p.m.*

