

**HON JAMES (JIM) McMILLAN BROWN**

*Condolence Motion*

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier)** [9.02 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house records its sincere regret at the death of Hon James McMillan Brown and tenders its deep sympathy to his family.

I begin by paying my respects, and Parliament's respects, to Jim's family in the Speaker's gallery today. I would like to name the people here: Bill and Jenny Brown, Timothy Brown, Rachel Brown, Kerry and John Fisher, Aaron Fisher, Peter Fisher, Amy Riley, Dawn Pianto, Chelsea Pianto, Vera Hughes, Rose Brown and Gaye McCulloch. I thank them all for coming along today to hear Jim's condolence motion. I believe other family members will be present to hear Jim's condolence motion in the Legislative Council.

Throughout Jim's 15 years of parliamentary service, he served in both chambers of the Western Australian Parliament. He was always willing to assist members and he worked hard on behalf of his rural and regional constituents. Jim was part of a proud tradition of farming Labor members of this Parliament.

Jim was born on 5 April 1927 to William and Susan in Merredin in regional Western Australia. Merredin would be a town that remained an important place for Jim throughout his life and career. His parents owned the local coffee shop, then named the Coffee Palace and later Raphael's. They had farming interests in the area and ran the Cummins Theatre—an historic building that still stands in Merredin today. He spent his early years in Merredin, attending the local state school for the greater part of his education. However, tragedy struck the family when his father passed away on Jim's fifth birthday. Following the death of William, Mrs Brown took the family to Fremantle and Jim finished school at John Curtin High School.

His first step into the workforce was a brief stint selling newspapers before enlisting in the Royal Australian Air Force in 1945. He actively served in the RAAF as a leading aircraftman in Australia, but obviously in 1945 the war was drawing to a close and he was discharged in 1946. Soon after the war, Jim returned to the greater Merredin area for many years, running the Muntadgin store and later a Massey Ferguson farm machinery dealership with his brother George. He also spent many years as a farmer, firstly around the north east of Merredin and then later in life in Warralakin, as well as spending many years as an insurance agent.

He had a love for sport and played for the South Fremantle Football Club. He was elected foundation president of the Muntadgin Golf Club and was president and player of the year of the Merredin Football Club. Jim played for Merredin the day the club won its first premiership and a look back through the Merredin newspapers during the 1950s will reveal that the playing stats and accolades for his football performances received regular mention. However, Jim also had a love for public life.

In 1953, following encouragement from the local community, he ran for local government, and was elected to the Totadgin Ward. He was only 25 years old at the time, making him one of the youngest men in local government in Western Australia. In 1956, he moved into the Merredin township. He resigned the seat and was then elected for the central ward on the council, which he held until 1960. But that was not to be the end of his public life and he would soon turn to state politics. Jim first ran for state Parliament for the seat of Merredin–Yilgarn in 1968 when he was pre-selected to replace Labor minister Lionel Kelly, but he lost to Jack Stewart from the Liberal Party. He contested the seat in 1971. He was successful and became the second ever Labor member to hold the electorate. History shows that Merredin–Yilgarn, which later became known as just Merredin, has not been a seat for those of us on this side of politics to win easily or to easily hold. For most of that electorate's existence it was held by National, Country or Liberal Party members of Parliament.

It was a sign of the standing of Jim Brown that he held within the Merredin community that he was elected for that seat, overturning a long trend. But it was short-lived, and during the 1974 election, when the Tonkin government was defeated, he was beaten by the well-known National Country Party and then National Party MP Hendy Cowan. However, his short time in this place was only the beginning of Jim's parliamentary career, because in 1980 he was elected to the upper house seat of South-East Province—a seat he would hold until 1989—after which he became the very first member for Agricultural Region, which he held until his retirement in 1992. Going from representing the much smaller area of the lower house to the much larger area of Agricultural Region would have been difficult. He served across a long period under two Labor Premiers, Premiers Tonkin and Burke, and in the first Court government and the O'Connor Liberal government. He served this place across a range of committees. In fact, during his final term he served as Chairman of Committees and Deputy President of the Legislative Council—only the second Labor member to hold that position. In addition, he served on two royal commissions: the Honorary Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into Hire Purchase and Other Agreements and the Honorary Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into Dairy Products and Market Milk.

But perhaps he was best known by current members for being a member and then the secretary of the Western Australian Parliamentary Former Members Association, a role that saw him frequent the members' lounge long after his retirement. In fact, that role earned him the nickname "the politicians' shop steward". If any MP needed assistance, Jim was the go-to person in Parliament. I have been here 24 years now and I often saw Jim around Parliament, not so much in recent years, but over the years he was a stalwart. There was a group of older MPs—or former MPs; they seemed older to me then—who used to gather and have lunches, and Jim was one of the group.

It is fair to say that Jim Brown was a stalwart of the Labor Party in the regions. Former Premier Peter Dowding wrote in the notice he placed in the paper —

Jim ... was a true Labor man. He represented rural and mining communities and later in life outer suburban areas and always with the same care and concern for the common people of Australia. He was not showy but he was dedicated ...

Hon Kim Chance, who has also passed away, described Jim's advocacy of country people as "having few peers". Those who knew Kim Chance know what a compliment that is. Jim was respected by his opponents. He was a loyal member of the Australian Labor Party and was well regarded by his constituents.

In the final line of his inaugural speech in 1971, he said something that has stuck with me. He said —

We must face our responsibilities with fortitude and courage to ensure that this State is served to the fullest possible extent.

When it comes to our roles here, I believe Jim Brown was completely right. On behalf of the state Parliamentary Labor Party and the government of Western Australia, can I pass our condolences on to his family and friends. Can I thank them for allowing Jim to serve in this Parliament with such distinction. Vale Jim McMillan Brown.

Members: Hear, hear!

**MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition)** [9.10 am]: I rise on behalf of the Liberal Party to extend our condolences and best wishes to the family of James McMillan Brown. James McMillan Brown served the electors of the eastern wheatbelt and the goldfields in both houses of the Western Australian Parliament, and has the distinction of being the last member of the Australian Labor Party to represent Merredin and its adjacent rural shires in the Legislative Assembly.

Jim Brown was born in Merredin in 1927, his father having a varied career as a small businessman and farmer. He completed his schooling in Fremantle, sold newspapers and worked for the Fremantle Harbour Trust in 1944, until at the age of 18 he enlisted in the RAAF in April 1945. He was discharged in 1946 as a leading aircraftman, working for a ship repairer and then for a bus company from 1947 to 1950 while playing for the South Fremantle Football Club.

In 1950, Jim Brown relocated to the eastern wheatbelt, joining his brother in a store at Muntadgin before taking over the Massey Ferguson dealership in Merredin in 1955. He also became a service station proprietor, a farmer after 1960 and a Justice of the Peace, while serving on the Merredin shire council from 1953 until his election to Parliament. Having joined the Australian Labor Party in 1952, he served as its Merredin branch president from 1964 until 1968.

At the 1968 election, Jim Brown was endorsed as the Labor candidate for Merredin–Yilgarn to succeed Hon Lionel Kelly, who had represented the district since its creation in 1950. It extended from the Coolgardie and Yilgarn shires to include Merredin, Kulin, Kondinin and Narembeen, and was now a highly marginal seat, given the loss of Lionel Kelly's personal vote. At the 1968 election, Jim Brown polled just under 40 per cent of the vote and after preferences was defeated by 327 votes by the late Jack Stewart of the Liberal Party.

Jim Brown increased his community involvement as president of the Merredin shire from 1968 to 1971, and as an executive member of the Country Shire Councils' Association. He contested Merredin–Yilgarn at the 1971 election and raised the ALP vote to 45.3 per cent. A partial distribution of preferences gave him an absolute majority of 55 votes against the combined votes of the Liberal and Country Party candidates. Merredin–Yilgarn was one of three coalition seats whose capture enabled John Tonkin's government to take office after 12 years in opposition.

In his first speech to the Legislative Assembly, Jim Brown displayed his thorough understanding of the farming and mining industries in his diverse electorate, including the need for improved electricity, water and education services. However, a major electoral redistribution in 1972 removed the Shire of Coolgardie while adding the Shires of Bruce Rock and Corrigin. This made the district of Merredin–Yilgarn a weaker prospect for the Australian Labor Party. At the March 1974 state election, Jim Brown polled 38.8 per cent of the primary vote against Country Party and Liberal candidates, and was defeated by Hendy Cowan by 1 032 votes with a final margin of 42.1 per cent. He had nevertheless still maintained 62 per cent of the primary vote in the Shire of Merredin. For the next six years he worked as an AMP insurance agent, and farmed at Warralakin after 1980.

Jim Brown returned to Parliament at the 1980 state election, retaining a South East Province seat in the Legislative Council with 58.2 per cent of the vote in a straight contest with the Liberal Party. This two-member province comprised the districts of Kalgoorlie, Yilgarn–Dundas and Merredin, and had become marginal in the two previous elections. However, Jim Brown reversed this trend by polling 45.3 per cent within the now safe National Party district of Merredin, an indication of his enduring popularity in his former seat.

With the change to proportional representation in the Legislative Council in 1989, Jim Brown led the Australian Labor Party ticket for the Agricultural Region, reconnecting with his old base of Merredin. In his final term, he served as Deputy President and Chairman of Committees of the Legislative Council until March 1992, when he resigned and was succeeded by the late Kim Chance. In retirement, he served as honorary secretary of the Royal Commonwealth Society after 1999 and was secretary of the WA Parliamentary Former Members Association from 2003 to 2009.

Jim Brown was a community-based member whose success at the 1971 election was decisive in electing the Australian Labor Party to government. Although serving only one term in the Legislative Assembly, he gave a total 15 years of parliamentary service, assiduously representing some of our state's significant farming, mining and pastoral communities.

We extend our condolences to his daughter Kerry, his sons Richard and William, to their partners John, Jenny and Frances and to their families. We also extend our condolences to his constituents and friends, who no doubt have very fond memories of a very fine member of Parliament.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA)** [9.16 am]: I rise to contribute to this condolence motion on behalf of the Nationals WA and to acknowledge Kerry and John, Bill and Jenny, Vera, and the family members who are here today, and others who will join in the Legislative Council later. Our member for Agricultural Region, Hon Colin de Grussa, will speak on the motion in the Council. I note that although Jim and I were not members of the same party, we hold a number of things in common. We represented the eastern wheatbelt and those amazing communities out there and we served in both houses of Parliament. I will let Hon Colin de Grussa speak to his time in the Legislative Council.

James Brown—Jim, as he was better known—was one of only two Labor members to hold the seat of Merredin–Yilgarn from its creation in 1950 to its abolition in 2008. Like many parliamentary predecessors and many to follow, it was not Jim's first tilt that got him into the house on the hill. He first ran for Parliament at the 1968 state election to replace Lionel Kelly in the seat of Merredin–Yilgarn, but lost to Liberal Jack Stewart. Re-contesting the seat three years later, he won in the two-party preferred vote with 52.7 per cent. Three years on, he was defeated by the National Party's Hendy Cowan, who went on to be the member for Merredin right up until 2001. Jim's time in Parliament was not up, though. He went on to be a great servant to the greater agricultural region, serving for 12 years in the other place representing the South East Province and the Agricultural Region up to his resignation in March 1992. At the time of his lower house election in 1971, Jim's electorate covered seven local government areas—Kulin, Kondinin, Narembeen, Merredin, Westonia, Yilgarn and Coolgardie. At the upcoming election, the electorate of Central Wheatbelt will again take in the Shire of Kulin and all of those shires apart from the Shire of Coolgardie. Research conducted in my office in consultation with the WA Electoral Commission shows that it is the first time that Kulin rejoins what is now the Central Wheatbelt electorate in almost half a century, after being gazetted into the Narrogin electorate circa 1972, and remaining with the electorates to the south thereafter. I am proud to say today that I represent Kondinin, Narembeen, Westonia, Yilgarn, and Merredin—the town and district in which Jim was born and led much of his life.

I will talk briefly about Jim's upbringing in his community before leaving and then moving back to Merredin from Perth in 1950. Information regarding some of his earlier years have been taken from the book *The History of the Merredin District* published in 1962, and I acknowledge the author Frederick Law. Jim was born at Merredin District Hospital in 1927. He was the son of William McMillan Brown and Susan Brown, who were well known as the proprietors of Merredin Coffee Palace in Bates Street, which later became Raphael's.

After spending some years at Merredin state school, the family moved to Fremantle, where Jim attended John Curtin High School and played league football for South Fremantle. After serving in the RAAF, he went into business with his brother George at Muntadgin general store, and soon after was elected representative of Totadgin Ward on the Merredin Road Board. Aged 25, he was one of the youngest men in local government in the state in 1953. His representation continued on the board, including a stint as vice-chairman until 1960. He later served on the Shire of Merredin council from 1960 to 1972. Office bearing positions were accumulating, becoming foundation president of the Muntadgin Golf Club in 1955 before he and George moved back to Merredin to take over a stock and agency business. His interest in football had not waned and he quickly established himself as president of the Merredin Football Club in 1956, and played with the team the same year when the club won its first premiership in 30 years. Ironically, it was the same year his old club South Fremantle went down to East Perth in the Western Australian National Football League grand final in front of 37 000 at Subiaco Oval. Jim made the right club choice that year. At the Lions, he played with the late Paddy Crook, father of the former Nationals member for O'Connor, Tony Crook. Incidentally, when Tony's parents shifted the kids from the farm back into town, their house backed onto the Brown's.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 12 November 2020]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Mia Davies; Mr John McGrath; Mr Mick Murray; Speaker

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Tony and Jim's son Richard used to walk to school together, and play cricket and golf. Their back fences were touching, after all. For all its vastness, Western Australia is certainly a small place.

Trawling through Trove, Jim's name features in the *Merredin Mercury* sports section, including in the 17 May 1951 edition recalling the previous Saturday's game against Bruce Rock—they were mighty adversaries—in front of 1 000 spectators. One thousand spectators in Merredin—goodness. That is a cracker!

**Mr M.J. Folkard:** Especially to a couple of rookies!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was big back then. Country football was a big thing!

A pacy centre man, we are told that Jim's two goals that day helped reverse Bruce Rock's half-time lead and hand his side the win. I quote —

After half time Merredin made a number of changes in the position of their team. McGinniss to centre, Jim Brown centre half forward, Vickers to ruckman, Jack Brown half back flank and Crook centre half back.

They are some names that still exist in perpetuity in the community of Merredin. The report continues —

Merredin went further ahead when Jim Brown drove the ball right into the teeth of the goals and Arthur flew high to take a nice mark and bring up Merredin's seventh goal this giving them a 14 point lead on the game ...

Bruce Rock were battling hard but were no match for Merredin who had settled down as a team and were playing fast open systematic football.. Jim Brown put the issue beyond doubt when he dropkicked a lovely running goal.

Sadly, the *Merredin Mercury* no longer exists—we have a local paper called the *Merredin Phoenix*—but it is wonderful to go back and look at these regional newspaper articles and reflect on what was happening in the community at that time. Jim may have liked putting on a clinic in front of 1 000 spectators, but truth be told the numbers were there to watch Subiaco take on the Eastern Wheatbelt, because the Merredin–Bruce Rock game was the curtain-raiser for that particular event.

Sporting prowess aside, and as illustrated by his early foray into the general store, Jim was a businessman and for some time he ran a local garage and machinery dealership—Massey Ferguson, I believe. In his maiden speech, Jim referenced the productivity and diversity of his electorate. He outlined agricultural, pastoral and mining activity's enormous contribution to the state—something I am proud to say continues in my electorate, and those adjacent, today. The concerns Jim held for his electorate in the early 1970s included the recession occurring in districts that he represented, farms growing bigger and population growth stagnating. One thing is for sure: the resilience of those communities that Jim represented was strong and it has been an enduring representation for those whom I represent today.

I was pleased that the *Merredin Phoenix*, which is the local newsletter that covers that district, ran a tribute to Hon James McMillan Brown on 19 June 2020, and today, on behalf of the Parliamentary National Party, I pay my tribute to a former member for Merredin–Yilgarn and South East Province. I again acknowledge Kerry, Bill, Vera and all the family members who have joined us today. From all accounts, from those I have spoken to in Merredin and through the recollections of others, Jim absolutely lived a rich life, contributing much to his community. I hope you all share very many fond memories of him and understand that his impact in shaping regional Western Australia will be enduring.

Members: Hear, hear!

**MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth)** [9.24 am]: Jim Brown was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1971 and as has already been said, he served one term until 1974 as the member for Merredin–Yilgarn, and six years later he did what not many members can do: he returned to Parliament as a member of the Legislative Council, representing South East Province, later to become the Agricultural Region, until his retirement in 1992. I have spoken to some members who worked with Jim, and they said that he was a very conscientious member of Parliament with an amazing work ethic—a man of great principle. As the Premier has already mentioned, former Premier Peter Dowding paid Jim a great tribute when he said that he represented rural and mining communities, but always showed care and concern for the common people. We all know that is important in the job that we do.

It is interesting that Jim came into this place with a diverse background. He worked in a lot of areas, as the Premier has already pointed out. There are a couple of things that Jim and I share in common. I notice that Jim's father, William McMillan Brown, among other things, was a bookmaker—very close to my heart! I also notice that Jim went to John Curtin High School, my former school. I am not sure whether it was called John Curtin then, because I think it was only the first or second year of John Curtin when I went there, so it might have been Fremantle Boys' School.

**Mr I.C. Blayney:** John Curtin might have still been alive!

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** He might have been!

Jim certainly lived in Fremantle, which I did, and members know what I say about Fremantle people; they are very good people! The other thing I noticed too is that Jim sold newspapers in Fremantle. When I was going to John Curtin, I also sold newspapers on the corner of High Street and Market Street for some time. There is a parallel there. I did not know all this when I first met Jim in 2006.

After being elected in 2005, I was enticed by the late Trevor Sprigg to become a member of the parliamentary bowls team. One of the longstanding members of that team was the late Jim Brown. I would often talk to Jim. I did not know he was a shop steward back then. I was a new member of Parliament on the opposite side, but I would often talk to Jim about his experiences in Parliament and he was a font of much knowledge. He was a man you could listen to. You could talk about what you were experiencing as a new member, and I always found that he gave good advice. But he was a stickler for protocol. If you were talking too loud when Jim got on the mat, he would turn around and give you a glare. It was not too hard to have a difference of opinion with Jim, because he was a pretty strong character. He was always good company and I enjoyed my time with him. After meeting him on that first interstate carnival that we went to, I saw quite a bit of Jim. I agree that Jim was often in this place as a member of the former members' association.

It is interesting that we talk about Jim playing at South Fremantle Football Club. Jim did not play a lot of games for South Fremantle, but you have to remember that the era he was in was a golden era for South Fremantle. It was an unbeatable team of champion players, and it would have been hard to get a game, but Jim played for that side. He played a handful of games between 1947 and 1950. His mate Ron Leeson told me a story once that Jim talked about his first ever game for South. The coach basically said, "Jim, you've got a game on Saturday; you're playing in the league side". Jim said, "Fantastic; that's good." The coach said, "You're playing on Pops Heal." For those who do not know much about football, Stan "Pops" Heal was a superstar. He actually played in a premiership in Melbourne on one Saturday and came back to Perth and played for West Perth in a premiership. He was a legend. He is in the Australian Football Hall of Fame. Jim's first game was against Popsy Heal. He used to joke about that. He said, "Gee, Popsy must have got a giggle when he saw me running down to stand on him." But, from what I heard, Jim was a very, very good country footballer.

Ironically, Jim and Pops also shared something very similar, although it was not their football prowess, as they both later became Labor members of Parliament. From 1953 to 1965, Pops Heal was the member for West Perth and then later for the seat of Perth in this chamber. Those two guys, who once played on each other, whether it was at Fremantle Oval or Leederville Oval, later became members of this place.

As has been said, in later life after leaving Parliament, Jim was still very involved. He was on the board of the Parliamentary Superannuation Board and he was also on the executive of the Western Australian Parliamentary Former Members Association, serving as secretary for six years. In the members' bar, there is a plaque on the wall with four photos—only four—of people who have been made life members of the former members association. The others are the late Tom Bateman, the late Sir Charles Court and Jim's mate Ron "Dodger" Leeson, who served with him in the upper house.

On behalf of the Liberal Party and all of us who knew Jim, I would like to say condolences to the family. As a racing man, I believe Jim had a relative who was a jockey. It might have been a grandson, but there was a young Brown who was a jockey. I remember being at a country race meeting one day when Jim mentioned it. We are never far away from the sport of kings. It has been great to be able to say a few words about a member of this place who made an outstanding contribution.

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston — Minister for Seniors and Ageing)** [9.32 am]: It is with great honour and pleasure that I stand to speak about the late James Brown, or Jim as we knew him. My first encounters with Jim were very similar to those of the member for South Perth, and were in the corridors of Parliament. If you got bailed up in the corridor by Jim, you had to have a bit of time because he would go right through the history of the bits and pieces that had been taken off parliamentary salaries—the train fares and the superannuation. Never mention super in front of Jim because you would be there for two days!

Seriously, he was known as a cantankerous old "b", but underneath he was one of the finest guys. He was sensational to socialise with. Being a good Liberal member, the member for South Perth has done me in! We went away for bowls and we had two teams and they asked me to be captain and I said yes, I would be captain, but they gave me Jimmy Brown. Everyone laughed and I wondered what that was about, but I soon found out. When we got on the bowling rink, Jim was down at the other end and, as the captain, I said, "Down this side, Jim." We would walk down the rink, because we were both deaf, and then we would walk back and he would say, "Down that side? Are you sure? You don't want it down the other side?" and I would say, "No, down that side." Sure enough, he would bowl it down the other side! It was the complete opposite of what I wanted. I got a bit jack of this, so the next time he got to bowl, I went and sat on the chairs and refused to tell him where to bowl because he wanted to bowl it his

way: “You bloody do it your way then, Jim.” He came storming down to me: “How the bloody hell do you think I’m going to bowl if you’re not going to tell me where to bowl!” That is what he was like.

On the social side, my wife and I had many a fine wine and a beer or dinner with Jim. As has been said, he would help members endlessly in campaigning and connecting with their community, because he had done it—and he had done it the hard way. Once a member gets out, it is very difficult to come back in, but he was able to do that. We also had a synergy in the sense of being country members, so he understood.

Overall, his last few years were not the greatest. We all knew that and took some time to visit him, especially John Bradshaw, as a former member, who checked on him on a regular basis to see how he was going.

All I can say about Jim is that he was a great bloke and he was good to have an argument with because he forgot it within 10 minutes and got on with life. Vale Jim Brown and condolences to the family.

**THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson)** [9.34 am]: I would like to say a few words. I first met Jim at the bowls carnival. For my sins, as I found out later, I was in Jim’s team. I said to him, “I haven’t played before, Jim” and he said, “No; it’s all right, mate. I’ll get you through.” After the game, he came up and said, “You were right; you’re hopeless!” As the member for South Perth would say, I have not improved over the years! After the games, we would sit down and have a meal and a few wines. His knowledge of Parliament and people, and the way he did things, made him a remarkable man. As the minister said, he had a bit of a fiery temper and if you did not bowl the right way, you knew about it! But it was all in fun and once we walked off, the white line fever was gone.

I really admired Jim not only as a bowler, but as a person. I learnt a lot just by sitting down and talking and listening to him after a game of bowls. It is great to see Ron “Dodger” Leeson in the gallery. He is another one who thinks I cannot bowl! Jimmy Brown was a true believer. He was a great person and I am very proud to have known him. I would like to offer my condolences to the family members here today.

I request all members to rise for one minute’s silence in order to carry the motion.

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