

Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Terry Redman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Terry Healy; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr David Templeman; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Roger Cook; Mr David Michael;  
Speaker

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**HON JOHN KOBELKE**

*Condolence Motion*

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier)** [12.02 pm] — without notice: I move —

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

Today we pay tribute to a long-serving member of this chamber, John Kobelke. I acknowledge the family and friends of John who are in the gallery today, including Stephanie, John's wife; Simon, Carl and Andrew, John's sons; and other family members and friends who are present in large numbers today. On behalf of the government, I would like to pass on our deepest sympathies.

It is very sad to be doing this today for a member who has not long departed from this chamber. Usually when we do these condolences, there are only a handful of members, if any, in the chamber who served with the person who has passed. The fact that he passed away so soon after leaving here shows how much more John had to offer before he was taken from us.

John was born in June 1949 in Mt Lawley to John Edward Barrett Kobelke, who was a painter, and Kathleen Mary Fraser. He was educated at St Columba's School in Bayswater and the Christian Brothers' College in Highgate before doing a Bachelor of Science and a diploma of education at the University of Western Australia. He went on to use that dip ed to teach across Western Australia and Papua New Guinea as a maths teacher. He was one of the first teachers to secure a commonwealth innovations grant, which allowed him to introduce computers into his teaching.

John Kobelke never set out to be a politician, although he was politically active. He was a strong supporter of the Australian Labor Party, handing out how-to-vote cards as a teenager, years before he became a member at the age of 27. Beyond his involvement in the Labor Party, he was a passionate activist. He was secretary of the Conscientious Objectors' Advisory Committee and a founding member of the Perth Moratorium Movement in relation to the Vietnam War. I learnt a lot about John's anti-Vietnam War activities at John's funeral some weeks ago. He was also a foundation member of Teachers for Nuclear Disarmament. One thing I find remarkable is that this man went from a background as a campaigner and an activist to finish his career as one of the safest pairs of hands in Western Australian politics.

John was eventually elected to Parliament in February 1989 to the seat of Nollamara, and in 2005 to the seat of Balcatta when Nollamara was abolished. He served this Parliament for 23 years across four Labor administrations—Dowding, Lawrence, Gallop and Carpenter. In addition to countless committee positions and shadow portfolios, he served this state as Parliamentary Secretary of the Cabinet from 1992 to 1993, and as a cabinet minister in the Gallop and Carpenter governments across the portfolios of police and emergency services, water resources, sport and recreation, Indigenous affairs, consumer and employment protection, labour relations, and employment and training.

John achieved a lot over his time in Parliament. He had a role in our city's water security, overseeing the delivery of our first desalination plant in Kwinana. He really loved talking about water! He was so interested in water—perhaps ahead of the time when we really realised we had a problem. He had a role in saving the Ningaloo Reef. He was proud of saving our old-growth forests for the enjoyment of future generations, but he was equally proud of ensuring that the workers and communities of the south west affected by this decision were taken care of. He noted in his valedictory speech that the government could have saved the forests just by legislation or regulation, but instead it knew it was essential to work with the community—to talk to them, to hold countless hours of meetings and ensure the communities and workers were supported. John knew that in order to truly conserve the environment for future generations, it had to be done properly. People cannot be thrown on the scrap heap; they need a future as well. John Kobelke understood that the purpose of the Labor Party was, to quote him —

... to represent the rights of those people who are trampled on because they do not have the strength to stand up for their rights to get a better wage to look after their family.

With that core belief, John made a fantastic minister for industrial relations and delivered a lot for the working people of Western Australia. He is responsible for much of our state's system of industrial relations and oversaw a system that, during his time, delivered a 30 per cent rise in the minimum wage whilst the rate of unemployment fell.

Although he was a great minister, his passion really lay in being a great local MP. He was proud of his patch and worked incredibly hard to deliver for his constituents. He, himself, was most proud of delivering for his electorate, even listing the influencing of the final alignment of Reid Highway as one of his greatest achievements.

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Even outside of Parliament he continued his relentless work ethic. He ran training sessions for new opposition MPs and staff on how to be effective in estimates hearings. He continued to serve his state, helping the government on the Swan Valley planning review. For me, he was a source of counsel, and he was invaluable in assisting my team—staff and MPs—in transitioning to government two years ago. It is no exaggeration to say that he was a mentor to many who sit in this Parliament today.

There are not many in politics who are respected like John. After his passing, many tributes have flowed—from the Labor Party, former members, local branches, the Governor, the City of Stirling, his local parish, Christian education, the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Lions club, the physio staff at Osborne Park Hospital, Ruah Community Services, the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, the Italo–Australian Welfare and Cultural Centre, WorkCover WA, Water Corporation staff, Edith Cowan University, the Siciliani Association of WA, the Nollamara Sports and Recreation Club bowling division, and the Balga pensioners club, to say the least. They are just the ones that were published in *The West*. The crowd at his funeral a few weeks ago was enormous, and luminaries from all parts of Western Australia and Australia were in attendance. No doubt, today, a number of speakers will wish to acknowledge John, including those of us who knew him well. He was a quiet person—at times—diligent and utterly committed to his state and his family.

On a personal note, I will start by acknowledging his family. John loved his family. I remember having dinner with John and Stephanie when I was first elected to Parliament. The two younger boys were little fellas running around at this holiday flat that they had in Mandurah. Then at the funeral I saw these strapping men standing making marvellous speeches. John would have been so proud of you that day. I thought that the presentations by John's three sons were outstanding. They are terrific young men. He would have been so proud of you—I know he was proud of you.

I shared an office with John in my first term. When we have been here a while, our first term is our most memorable. It is when we learn everything and we see everything. I think we are the most excited in our first term in Parliament. It is one of the most exciting parts of our life. I shared an office with John at the bottom of that stairway that, outside this chamber, would be condemned. It was the office right at the bottom of that stairway. I was allocated that office with John. He had been here for seven or eight years when I arrived, and I learned a lot from him. He was a hard worker and he was mature about considering issues. He was not an acrimonious person. He did not hold a grudge or take things personally. In some ways he was very modern and in some ways very traditional. His values were very traditional, but, on the other hand, technically he was very modern. He was into technology and computing. He was a maths teacher. That is very rare in the Australian democracy—someone who is actually good at those things. He could look at a set of documents and analyse them without someone telling him what they meant—that is rare. He and I shared that office for four years in the days before we had modern mobile phones—our mobile phones were the old clunky ones. There was no TV in the office; we had a monitor on the wall we used to listen to, invariably tuned to the lower house. I think I put it on the upper house one day and he switched back immediately.

John was a great person to share an office with. The sittings back then were much longer than they are now and we spent a lot of time in the office. I would always be talking to John, asking him questions and seeking his advice on various issues. I was finding my way and seeking advice on local issues in particular. He would invariably give me very considered advice about whatever it might be. If I did not take his advice, he did not take it personally. His values, as I said, were traditional. I remember when the quite famous abortion debate happened in this place, he was very straight down the line anti-abortion. He was very traditional in that sense, but, as I said, very contemporaneous in some of his views on other issues. He was a terrific fellow and I liked him a lot.

I served with John for all those years post sharing an office, in cabinet and in the chamber. When he left here in 2013, I remember asking him to stay, but he said he thought it was time for him to go. He did indicate to me at that point that he had a few health issues and I wished him all the best. He is one of those people who did not disappear; I saw him at a lot at functions and events. He remained loyal to the party; I will always admire that. He was loyal to his community and still went to community events. He was not a person who asked people to look at him or who sought attention; he was just someone who wanted to make a contribution. His passing is a deep loss and I feel for his family because I know they loved him deeply as well.

**MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition)** [12.14 pm]: I rise to contribute to this condolence motion for Hon John Kobelke. John Kobelke made a lifelong commitment to the Labor Party through a career as a teacher, followed by 24 years as a member of the Legislative Assembly and over seven years as an effective and well-regarded minister. He was born in June 1949 in Mt Lawley, the son of a painter, and educated at St Columba's School in Bayswater and Christian Brothers High School in Highgate. At the University of

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Western Australia, he gained a Bachelor of Science and then a diploma of education. He started his teaching career at St Louis School in Claremont. He then volunteered to serve in Papua New Guinea from 1973 to 1976 as a high school teacher, a coordinator of community education and an officer in the PNG Bureau of Statistics. On returning to Perth, he taught science at Girrawheen High School and Scarborough Senior High School from 1976 to 1983.

John Kobelke was an activist at university in the era of conscription and the Vietnam War. I was interested to learn that he was secretary of the Conscientious Objectors' Advisory Committee from 1969 to 1972 and a foundation member of both the Perth Moratorium Movement and Teachers for Nuclear Disarmament. As a member of the State School Teachers' Union of WA, he was a Trades and Labor Council delegate from 1982 to 1983 for its metropolitan high schools branch.

In 1976, John joined the Australian Labor Party, later serving as president of the Stirling electorate council. He took a break from teaching from 1983 to 1986. As the cabinet office executive officer during the first term of the Burke government, he gained valuable experience in the process of government. Subsequently, he resumed teaching at John Curtin High School and was a pioneer in securing a commonwealth innovations grant to introduce computer teaching in schools. It is a measure of the trust in which he was held that he was successively appointed returning officer of the teachers' union from 1985 to 1987, and of the WA ALP from 1987 to 1988.

Although John Kobelke stated in his 2012 valedictory speech that he had no ambition to enter Parliament, he was a clear choice for Labor endorsement for the redrawn district of Nollamara for the 1989 state election. The seat then contained Liberal-voting areas and was not as safe as its name suggested. He was elected with a majority of 1 150 votes, or 53.6 per cent, which increased to 1 760, or 54.7 per cent, in 1993 despite a statewide swing against Labor. Later, in 1996 and 2001, he had very solid majorities of 3 450 and 6 870—a two-to-one victory. A redistribution morphed the Nollamara electorate further westward into a revived district of Balcatta for the 2005 election, but he was comfortably returned with nearly 60 per cent of the vote. Although Balcatta was transformed into a marginal seat at the 2007 redistribution, John held off a strong Liberal challenge by 860 votes in 2008, winning with a margin of 52.2 per cent. As the member for an adjacent seat, I know that it was his personal standing that was so decisive in that final contest.

In October 1992, in his first parliamentary term, John Kobelke was appointed as Parliamentary Secretary of the Cabinet for the last six months of the Lawrence government. In opposition for the following eight years, he served continually as a shadow minister. He covered planning, along with lands; family, until March 1996, when he took responsibility for education and later employment and training until January 1997. In the following term of Parliament, he combined the portfolios of labour relations, employment and training, and freedom of information, also becoming opposition Leader of the House in 1999. With the election of the Gallop government in 2001, he served in the portfolios of labour relations, consumer affairs, and employment and training. In 2003, he also took on Indigenous affairs, public sector management and assisting the Minister for Water Resources. After 2006, in the Carpenter government, he was Minister for Water Resources; Sport and Recreation, and assumed the additional major portfolio of police and emergency services in June that year. Throughout this period, from 2001 to the 2008 election, he served as Leader of the House. He has the record of a thoroughly competent and reliable minister.

In his final term, John Kobelke stood down from the front bench and in March 2012 announced his intention to leave Parliament at the 2013 election. In his valedictory speech in November of that year, he expressed his guiding political principle, stating —

... I think what still burns there for me, and what I think is ... much the strength of this side of the house, is that we want to represent those people who do not have a voice or whose voice is simply pushed aside. We want to be able to represent the rights of those people who are trampled on because they do not have the strength to stand up for their rights to get a better wage to look after their family.

John continued his public service after leaving Parliament, notably by chairing a review into planning the future development and tourism potential of the Swan Valley. However, as a local member, I would also see him in shopping centres, at Bunnings and all sorts of places selling traditional Lions Christmas cakes. He and Stephanie remained in Lions Clubs Australia for a long time. I also really loved seeing John out on the hustings during election campaigns. I know that he had a close relationship with the now member for Balcatta. He was a fearsome and fearless campaigner, and was the kind of person who was always out there in the fray. People really loved him. He had great rapport with people and he could communicate with anyone. It was obvious as he got around the electorate that he was a formidable political opponent.

The other thing that arose from my interactions with John is I really honoured him as a very ethical man. His ethics shone through. He was one of those people whose ethics drove him and they informed every decision and every

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vote in every one of his interactions. In my first few months as a member in this place in 2009 I did some ethics training, but I really learnt a lot of lessons in ethics from John Kobelke. John actually said to me that one of the tests of ethics is if you are getting too excited about something you are involved in, stop and think: what is in it for me and how appropriate is it for me to continue with this? That was my guiding principle as a cabinet member in the previous Liberal government. If I was getting too excited about something on the cabinet notice paper, I would hear John's voice in my ear saying, "If you're getting too excited about this, you might have a pecuniary interest or a conflict of interest. Have a think about that before you go any further." That was a great guide for me, and it was John Kobelke who gave me those words to consider before I made any decision on any matter before cabinet.

The other thing about John was, as a new member sitting over there, he never lost his authority as a high school teacher. He really did not. As a new member in this place I was quite nervous. I sat over there where the member for Murray–Wellington sits and John sat on this side of the house. He had a booming voice that rattled the windows and I would sit there thinking, "Good God! Who is that man and how do I get that confident?" He was one of those people who could captivate and completely hold court, but he also held court because whatever he said at the time was relevant.

I looked upon John quite fondly. In fact, he said to me on a number of occasions, "Don't tell anyone I told you this—you're doing a good job, but you're on the wrong side of the house." I took that, as members in this place often do, very much as a compliment.

The way that one can judge the impact and the difference that an individual makes is to look at who attends their funeral and what is said about them at their funeral. There is an old adage that says show me your friends and I will tell you who you are. I was really privileged to sit in the church in Woodlands and look around to see who was there to pay tribute to John Kobelke. There were people from all walks of life; people from every demographic and every socioeconomic group; hundreds of people who had been impacted by the efforts of John Kobelke.

I would also like to say a big congratulations to his sons, Simon, Carl and Andrew. The tributes that you paid your father at his funeral were absolutely outstanding. One of the measures of an individual is the quality and calibre of the children who follow them, and I think anybody who was at that funeral and heard those young men speak absolutely got the measure of the father in whose footsteps they have learnt and in whose footsteps they follow. I pass on my condolences to Stephanie, Simon, Carl and Andrew, and daughter-in-law Hope, and his grandchildren. Thank you for giving John to the service of our community. He really did make a massive difference and had a tremendous impact. He is one of those members who was highly regarded by everybody who has ever set foot in this place. Vale, John Kobelke.

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood)** [12.25 pm]: On behalf of the Nationals WA, I rise to make a contribution to the condolence motion for John Kobelke, former member for Balcatta. I would like to express our sincere condolences to his family and friends, especially to John's wife, Stephanie; his children, Simon, Carl and Andrew; and also to John's long-serving electorate officer, Ann Roberts. I guess as members of Parliament we all know how connected, very much like a second family, our electorate officers become.

So far we have heard that John was elected as member for the former seat of Nollamara in 1989, which he held until 2005 when the electorate was abolished in the redistribution of 2003. From 2005, he was local member for the newly created seat of Balcatta, which he held up until his retirement in March 2013.

John held ministerial positions in governments led by Geoff Gallop and Alan Carpenter, in a career that served his electorate and the people of Western Australia for over 24 years. That is a huge effort and a credit to John. Even after his retirement, he continued to serve his party. It has already been mentioned, but as recently as 2017 he was appointed by Minister Saffioti to lead the review into the Swan Valley planning framework. He held a variety of portfolios at different times in his political career, including police and emergency services; water resources; sport and recreation; community safety; Aboriginal affairs; consumer affairs; labour relations; and employment and training.

As well as being a dedicated long-serving member of his party, John was well liked and respected by members on both sides of the house. He was also quite pragmatic and was vocal on the constraints he saw in our current four-year election cycle. He would outline how politicians were often unwilling to implement long-term policies due to the fact that they might be unpopular with voters. One of John's greatest achievements was being responsible for legislative and policy changes that restored fairness to WA's industrial relations system. John was always concerned about other people and their wellbeing. His genuine interest in people was well recognised. In his valedictory speech he paid tribute to the mileage gained on the issue of climate change as well as importantly reflecting on how he wished more could be achieved in the area of Aboriginal affairs. The fact that John was an elected a member for Parliament for 24 years shows the huge respect he earned from his constituents and the trust

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they placed in him to represent them. This is the highest accolade that he could have received, as he really was the people's person.

I took time to ask Terry "Tuck" Waldron to provide a little comment, as Tuck followed John as the sport and recreation minister in Western Australia after the 2008 election. Tuck also served with John from 2001 until John's retirement in 2013. When Tuck thinks about John Kobelke, the words "terrific bloke" immediately spring to mind. He describes John as a very intelligent man who was well regarded by all who met him. Tuck recalls he had the loudest debating voice in the Parliament; a point not lost in today's discussion. Even though John and Tuck were on opposite sides of politics, they had great mutual respect and often chatted about sporting matters. Tuck greatly respected and appreciated his advice. John was of particular assistance to Tuck when he first became the Minister for Sport and Recreation. John shared advice about staff. In fact, Tuck took a lot of John's staff from his ministerial office. He shared advice on department matters and briefed Tuck on a range of issues he was dealing with. That shows the calibre of the man, his interest in putting people above politics, and the importance he placed on ensuring that projects continue. In return, Tuck always ensured that John was invited to the openings of the facilities and programs that he had been involved in, and that his contribution was properly acknowledged. Tuck described him as a very decent man and is sincerely sorry that he cannot be here today for this condolence motion.

On a more personal level, I have been in this house for a while and in my first term John taught me a very valuable lesson. When I was previously in opposition I sat in the seat behind me now. I recall chasing up John on some water reform matters. There were some big water issues in Manjimup. One of my constituents gave me a line of questioning that was very well referenced, with page numbers and a range of government documents. I thought it was pretty smart and I duly pursued those questions in the house. From memory, John was sitting next to Minister Saffioti. I was pursuing the issue pretty hard and John yelled out across the chamber, "Where does that information come from?" I quickly grabbed the reference pages and cited all the pages and the documents that they came from, feeling pretty darn proud of myself. The next day, John took a Dorothy Dixier from his side and proceeded to highlight that the quotes I had taken from the referenced documents were, in fact, wrong. He stitched me up that day, but he taught me a very valuable lesson and one I have followed since—that is, to make sure the information presented in this place is checked and do not rely on someone else to do it. That only happened once, but I remember it very clearly. It happened at a time in my career that set me up to be a better member of Parliament. Once again, on behalf of the Nationals WA, I can say that John was one of the really good guys in politics. That is reflected in the comments today from both sides of the house. I offer my sincere condolences to his family. We know that he will be sorely missed.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police)** [12.31 pm]: John and I were parliamentary colleagues for some 19 years. John was elected to this place in 1989 and I was elected in 1994. We were parliamentary colleagues together from 1994 to 2013. However, our life journey started a long time before that as I knew John for well over 30 years. We were friends and colleagues and had a lot in common over that time. I knew John before I started teaching at John Curtin Senior High School in 1983. As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, at that time John was working in the cabinet office and I originally got to know John through the Labor Party. I was quite active in the Perth electorate and John was active in the neighbouring electorate of Stirling. I think it was in 1987 that John came to John Curtin Senior High School and we taught as teachers together until I left to enter the public service in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. We had a lot in common. While John was teaching at John Curtin Senior High School, he was preselected for the 1989 state election. It was always expected that John would make a very strong contribution in this place and to politics, and would quickly rise to the front bench. As has been reflected on, Hon Keith Wilson moved to the newly created marginal seat of Dianella and supported John Kobelke to be preselected for the safer seat of Nollamara. I think that four new seats were created in the redistribution of 1988 ahead of the election in 1989; Dianella was one of those new seats. I looked through my old records and have managed to find the preselection letter that John sent to state executive delegates in 1988. I will quote from that. He wrote, "For a senior minister to vacate his safe seat and contest a marginal electorate in order to promote the re-election of a state Labor government is an extraordinary event. I am flattered and humbled that Keith Wilson has asked me to seek preselection for his seat of Nollamara."

Members may remember the politics of the time. The 1989 election was not one that the Labor Party was predicted to win. The campaign slogan was "Dowding's working", and we put a lot of work into developing the Dowding persona and getting people to know who he was. A key part of that unanticipated Labor win in 1989 were the strategic moves that were made. We got the right candidate into the seat of Nollamara and Keith Wilson, who had an outstanding reputation as a minister and as a person, contested and won the seat of Dianella.

As everyone does, he initially sat on the back bench, but it is a testament to the confidence people had in John that before the end of his first term, he was a parliamentary secretary in the Lawrence government. That is, effectively, when his rise began. Unfortunately, 1993 to 2000 were years in opposition. Nobody really enjoys being in

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opposition. I can attest to that because I have spent time on both sides of the house more than once. Some people become despondent in opposition, but others shine. It was really John's chance to shine. He took on frontbench portfolios and roles and had a strong voice and persona. As the member for Warren–Blackwood commented, if members want to last and have some credibility, they have to do their homework. John absolutely did that. He was thorough and did his own research. More than in government, in opposition, members have to do all their own work and research. They have to develop friendships and relationships with people to get information to help them, because they do not have the resources of government. For those of us with busy electorate offices, our two staffers are generally flat out dealing with constituents' concerns, and we have to become very self-reliant. John did the research, did his homework and got his facts right, so he excelled. He excelled at not only preparation but also presentation. He had a very organised persona and presented an organised case for anything.

As has been commented, he held a range of portfolios in government and in opposition. I think that all members here are well aware of the high esteem every state Labor leader has held John in because he would not have held the positions he did if they had not. I will not repeat the various responsibilities and portfolios he was given in that time, because they have already been put on the record today.

John was always much more than a colleague for me; he was a friend. He was a friend that you could rely on for advice and support. He was an incredibly decent person you could trust implicitly. It is without question that he was clever and capable and extremely hardworking, but he was also a very loyal and highly principled person. John and I shared more than a common background, both of us having been high school teachers and having worked in key areas of government before entering politics and beginning our shared time here. We had a lot more than that by way of our common background; we also very much shared common values. Since John has passed, I have looked back over time and I cannot remember anything that we disagreed about—it seems incredible, does it not? It certainly helps that we agreed on things as essential as politics, religion and football. Not only did John support the West Coast Eagles, but also he and I were supporters of the East Perth Football Club, the mighty Royals. It seemed that almost nothing separated us. It is certainly a factor that we both hailed from the same Catholic social justice background. It meant that we shared a lot in our outlook on life and our values and aspirations for the wellbeing of others. He was a fantastic advocate for those people who needed an advocate, who needed support. He was an advocate for opportunities for young people. He supported the school chaplaincy service and a whole range of other things for young people. He was incredibly empathetic to the needs of the elderly and disadvantaged. He saw what was right and important in life and he acted accordingly.

I note that the Premier described him as being quiet. At first blush that was your impression of John. He was an incredibly polite, unassuming, well-mannered, socially conservative presence. He was gentle and compassionate, and so there was very much that side of John, and that was the side that most people saw. I spoke to people after John's funeral service, including some his family members, who had never seen the stronger, louder John that we all saw in Parliament. A number of people mentioned that they were pleased to hear me comment on that because it was a side of John that they had never seen. They had seen the loving grandad, the gentle, kind, compassionate person who John was. They did not know that he had this inner strength and outer force. He was all those empathetic, compassionate things, but he was also very strong, very reliable and very steadfast—a person of huge conviction who argued those convictions very loudly and passionately in this chamber. As Leader of the House, he would certainly take it up to the opposition at full volume, a volume that I have not heard in here since. Some people probably take these microphones in front of us for granted, but the chamber that John and I sat in for those early years did not have microphones and it did not have this seating arrangement. But let me assure members, John did not need a microphone. I really do not think anyone before John, and it is unlikely anyone after John, will speak so loudly in this place. When John took on parliamentary debate, it was akin to the mild-mannered Clark Kent turning into Superman. It was an incredible transformation. There were a number of months after the election in 2001 when Parliament did not sit, and over that time the new ministerial staffers, mainly administrative staff, got to know John in the office. They saw the very mild mannered, quiet, polite John, and then they happened to be at Parliament in the first week or two of sitting when John let fly. I am told there was a call to John's chief of staff from one of the more junior staffers. They said, "Quick, you'd better get down to Parliament. Something's happened, the minister is very upset!" They said, "Don't worry about it, that is just John in the Parliament—a different person."

John's ability in Parliament, his knowledge of standing orders and the strength of his parliamentary performance was absolutely amazing. There were times, though, when he took his performance right up to the edge of acceptability; for someone who was generally very mild mannered and a delightful person, occasionally he could say some really cutting things and did not miss an opportunity to correct someone or point out the errors of their thinking, if need be. There was that one famous occasion in 2001, which I think absolutely shocked Geoff Gallop. Of the story that I am about to outline, I think if Geoff Gallop was asked which one of his ministers had called

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another member of Parliament a wanker, not just once, but twice, the last minister he would have guessed would have been John Kobelke. John warmed up to it. One of his earlier interjections was, “Your hypocrisy is monumental.” That was one of the more polite interjections, but then he used that very unparliamentary term. When I looked back over *Hansard*, I saw that the comments reminded me, effectively, that they were made while a vote was taking place. As members know, the former member for Cottesloe, the former Premier who was not Premier at the time, obviously, could sometimes be goaded and inflamed a little, and it was a bit of sport in the evening: could we get Colin out of his box? There was the famous star jumping incident when we did achieve that. It was always a challenge to see whether we could get under Colin’s skin. None of us anticipated that John was going to say it in a very singsongy voice across the chamber. People in here know that sometimes during divisions, especially if it is about a heated topic, or especially if there is a little bit of an issue happening with one member to another across the chamber, it can happen, so he actually whispered sotto voce in his singsongy voice, “Colin’s a wanker. Colin’s a wanker.” It was never supposed to be recorded. There was a bit of an expectation that a lot of what was said during a division would not be recorded by *Hansard*, but it was, and we now had the microphones and the television, which had not been there before, and some of us were still getting used to that fact. So there was not only a *Hansard* record and a voice recording, but also an actual video recording of it, and it was played on TV. John was absolutely mortified; this was not what he wanted to be known for and even more so because his two young boys, Carl and Andrew, were still attending school and a Catholic school. John was a pretty strict, straitlaced kind of dad who would chide his boys if they said swear words, and here he was setting such a bad example in Parliament! That was his biggest fear: What would happen with the boys? What would they make of it? It turns out he need not have worried, because the boys then assumed legend status because their quiet, well-mannered daggy dad had turned into this challenging guy who had use a word that, as you might imagine, teenage boys found pretty amusing.

On another occasion in 2003 that appealed to me, his opposite number as Leader of the House complained that John was the only minister in the chamber listening. We have heard that complaint before, of course. John’s response was that he thought that it might reflect on the quality of that member’s contribution to the debate, less than subtly implying that the member was a little too boring to listen to. John carried on a bit more, implying, “Well, this is so boring; who’d want to be in here for this kind of thing?” He then added that he was saving up plenary indulgences for the next life, a phrase that is probably lost on people who do not come from some kind of Catholic background. A plenary indulgence is a bit like a bit of credit to help get us to heaven. Doing some kind of penance, I suppose, would be how most people would relate to it.

John’s performances were legendary. People here have reflected on what an outstanding local member he was, and without question, he was. I personally knew a lot of his branch members, and they absolutely loved John. I saw a lot of those people at his funeral service. As has been reflected on, he was an outstanding campaigner, not someone who shied away from campaigning and not someone who shied away from doorknocking. For everything else, John was hardworking in this Parliament, hardworking in his electorate, hardworking in support of his colleagues in this house and an exceptionally hardworking campaigner. He was also a fun and entertaining storyteller. John would tell a lot of stories about his campaigning. I will not have time to go into the full story today; I would have to refresh myself a bit on it. He went doorknocking in 1993 with Dianna Warnock, who won the seat of Perth with a very close count. As part of his doorknocking expedition, he was asked by a lady to help get her kangaroo off her bed. John tells a very funny story about that. He was not keen to go straight into the woman’s bedroom because of some propriety reasons, so he said, “I’ll just need to get the candidate to come with me.” Dianna was out doorknocking with him so he grabbed hold of her and they both went into the woman’s bedroom and, yes, there really was a kangaroo on her bed!

He doorknocked and assisted me on my first campaign for Glendalough. I had the support of a huge number of people for that by-election campaign, none better than John Kobelke, Nick Griffiths and Jack Marks. Jack of course, was from a very different part of the Labor Party from John, Nick and I. We were all the holy rollers and Jack was from the kind of commo left, having previously been not just a member but a candidate numerous times for the Communist Party. Jack and I had become great friends at the Perth City Council. No-one was more stunned than people like Ted Cunningham, John Kobelke and Nick Griffiths that somehow I had Jack Marks with me every step of the campaign and every step of the way. Jack was getting on a bit and we doorknocked, amusingly, because Jack reflects that it was Roberts Road. Jack collapsed on, I think it was, St Genesis church lawn. He said, “You guys are trying to get me. I looked up and I could see this sign that says ‘Roberts Road’ and there’s Nick Griffiths and John Kobelke trying to revive me and there’s the church, the Christ, the lot; I thought it was over.” We had a lot of fun.

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John did not doorknock just for me in Glendalough because he was my friend; he went out at every by-election, year after year, for a whole range of people. He was a champion for groups such as the Asbestos Diseases Society, not just someone who wanted to be a patron and put their name down but someone who genuinely participated and supported them and so forth.

Everything that John did was coloured by his profound belief in the dignity and worth of every human individual. He worked ceaselessly for those who have no or little voice. He was not ambitious for himself but fiercely ambitious for the welfare of other people. I think this was seen very clearly in his opposition to the Court government's changes to industrial relations. On the election of the Gallop government he set about winding back those industrial relations changes and restoring some balance and fairness so that ordinary working people could get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and have some security of work.

I might just finish the quote that was started by the Leader of the Opposition earlier in John's final valedictory speech. It is pretty sad to think that it is only a short time ago that he gave that speech in the house. He said —

I came to this place really without a burning ambition to be a member of Parliament ... But I think what still burns there for me, and what I think is very much the strength of this side of the house, is that we want to represent those people who do not have a voice or whose voice is simply pushed aside. We want to be able to represent the rights of those people who are trampled on because they do not have the strength to stand up for their rights to get a better wage to look after their family. The only rights those people have and the only opportunity those people have for advancement is through organised labour—that is, unions, or through the role of the Labor Party.

That was what drove John. That is why he was a member of the Labor Party. He saw our party as a way of looking after those in the community who needed help, those who were vulnerable, people who just want to get along in life and provide for their families, to do a fair day's work, to get a fair day's pay, to have the kinds of protections that workers in the workplace need—occupational health and safety coverage—and to be free of discrimination in the workplace or elsewhere within the community.

I do not think any of our speeches today can do justice to John's very long and significant contribution to the Western Australian Parliament and to community life in the state of Western Australia. Like others, and his family, I certainly will miss John very much. I will miss his kindness, his advice and his decency. I consider myself lucky to have had him as a friend and colleague. I am privileged to have walked much of the same path in life as John for a period of some 30 years.

It goes without saying that I, of course, extend my deepest condolences to Stephanie, Simon; his daughter-in-law, Hope; Carl and his partner, Emily; and Andrew and his partner, Ella. I also extend my sympathy to Geoff and Ann Roberts and Lida and the others who worked in John's electorate office. I might just note, not that I would not be proud to have Ann and Geoff as relatives, but they are not related. Ann worked with John for very, very many years. I know what a support she was to John and I thank her and the other electorate staff for that. I also acknowledge in the gallery, Robert and Dorothy Harvey. Robert was a particularly close friend of John and I know had been spending some really enjoyable time travelling with John in recent years having had, of course, a much longer history with John since university days.

It is often said that we learn more about people at their funerals and perhaps there is something I think all of us can learn from that about knowing our colleagues a little better. I was aware that John was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War. When I first entered Parliament, quite a number of my parliamentary colleagues were also conscientious objectors. Some people talked about that more than others, and for men of that era, like Bill Thomas, former member for Cockburn; and Eric Ripper, former member for Belmont; those stories were all pretty fresh. Although it seems like an awful long time ago to the current generation, people were really called upon to make a choice, and it was not an easy choice. That further reiterates the strength of John's character and the strength of his beliefs and the courage of his convictions. John had an outstanding career. At the same time he was an outstanding family person and a friend to so many people. Vale John Kobelke.

**MR T.J. HEALY (Southern River)** [1.00 pm]: I also rise to make a contribution to the condolence motion for the great John Kobelke. I found that he was a kind man, a gentleman, passionate and determined. He was a true Labor hero. A long time ago I was very honoured to serve on a campaign committee with the current members for Balcatta, Girrawheen and Mirrabooka. There was no doubt John Kobelke was in charge of that committee! He was always a teacher—a fellow educator. He was a maths teacher; I was an English teacher. We were both very proud former teachers' union members and delegates. I certainly aspire to have his teacher's voice in this chamber one day. He led us all as a candidate and as an MP, and in induction, training and education. He was truly a mentor. I remember him briefing candidates in 2008, 2013, 2017 and beyond. I did not get to see him in this chamber—he

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was before my time of course—but I know that he was a competent and wise minister. He was widely respected by both sides. I would have loved to have seen him as Leader of the House.

John held a number of ministerial portfolios. The simplest thing I can say is that every single time families in my electorate turn on their tap they have John Kobelke to thank for the great things he did as water minister. His name is also on the opening plaques at my local police station and at my local Bunnings. I keep finding different John Kobelke plaques around my electorate. He taught me about the eight-day raffle. He also taught me how to be a quizmaster. I now do about 10 quizzes a year because he showed me how important it is to be a quizmaster at local schools and community groups. John showed me the importance of doorknocking. He showed me how to campaign to fix the pothole in the footpath outside someone's house, and to make sure they knew it was the local MP! He also showed me how to be compassionate and how to be an advocate for every human who walks through the door of my electorate office.

I send my love to Stephanie and John's sons and daughters-in-law. I would like to mention his wonderful long-serving and long-suffering staff as well—Lida and Ken, and Ann Roberts—for all the times that we have worked together. Ann loved John as she loved Geoff, maybe almost as much as Andre Rieu; we had wonderful times together. I was also honoured to attend many Balcatta branch meetings to see how a member of Parliament can really work with a local branch in an incredible way.

Finally, I would like to share a story. At an Australia Day event there were 400 people in a local park. I rocked up with the candidate at the time —

**Ms J.M. Freeman:** Barry Britton Reserve.

**Mr T.J. HEALY:** It was at Barry Britton Reserve. John said, "Hi, Terry. How are you? Here's the apron, here's the tongs, start flipping eggs." He literally took the candidate around and met every single one of those 400 people. He never stopped campaigning. He never stopped working. He will always be a great local Labor hero.

**MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen)** [1.03 pm]: Some years ago, when John was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I received his ministerial Christmas card. The image was a painting by renowned Yindjibarndi artist Jody Broun and was titled "Whitefellas came to talk about land". The picture depicted two whitefellas wearing ties, long pants and broad-brimmed hats visiting a remote Aboriginal community. Community members were sitting in a circle on the ground, with dogs and kids playing in the pindan. It is evident that the whitefellas were talking "at" the community and not "with" them. It is also readily apparent that a four-wheel drive and a small plane were nearby so that a quick getaway could be made by the visitors—probably never to return and probably not sparing another thought for the concerns expressed or questions raised. Other than the resemblance to John and his ubiquitous sun-smart hat, I was puzzled. The scene portrayed in that painting was a far cry from how John Kobelke operated in practice. He would have engaged and really listened to those at the meeting and he would have carried away what he learnt, and conscientiously followed through upon returning to Perth. In a way, the fact that John Kobelke sent out such a card was a sign of his self-effacing inclinations—totally unwarranted.

Before continuing with my personal observations, I rely on the thoughts of others. Former Premier of WA and close cabinet colleague Geoff Gallop said of John —

It was with great sadness that I heard of John's death. He'd been such a wonderful colleague and supporter, always there to offer sound advice and those words of warning we politicians all too often push to one side.

He was a model citizen, serious politician and excellent member of Parliament. He cared. He listened and was dedicated to assisting those for whom life was a daily struggle. He was a well-respected minister and a thoughtful and constructive contributor to cabinet debates. Always sensible.

And who could forget the booming Kobelke voice rattling the rafters in the Legislative Assembly and calling all of us to attention!

John's commitment to the ALP and social justice I'd first seen at the University of WA in the early 1970s. He carried it forward, not just as an MP, but also after he retired when he assisted new Labor members learn the tricks of the trade.

Like so many others here today, I'm sure, I felt very comfortable when in John's company. He brought a warmth and a steadiness, even when disagreeing with you on matters of faith and public policy.

His presence will be missed by us all and my condolences go to Stephanie and the Kobelke family.

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Former North Metropolitan MLC Ed Dermer echoed these sentiments, emphasising John’s generosity towards others in imparting advice, mentoring party members and showing newer parliamentarians the ropes.

Bob Tanasoski, a long-time supporter and active member in the Macedonian community and a constituent, told me —

John was a very dear friend of mine and my family for over 30 years. He accomplished so much for our state and he did so much for our Macedonian community. He was such a wonderful human being with such a huge heart and kind soul. He will be greatly and truly missed.

John’s principal policy adviser, Simon Ward, who is now Minister Tinley’s chief of staff, wrote —

... he was a massive influence on my professional career and I feel so lucky to have had him as the first Minister I worked for and to work for him for five years as his Consumer Protection Adviser.

In that time, there were many contentious and complex issues in the portfolio—the Finance Brokers scandal and the subsequent Royal Commission, the collapse of HIH insurance and Ansett, the ongoing implementation of FuelWatch just to name a few. People forget the weeks of angst and outrage when petrol prices hit \$1 a litre and John was heavily criticised by the retail fuel industry for proposing the radical idea that people should buy fuel from the cheapest outlets. Western Australia had the strictest environmental fuel standards in the country and John was in his element dealing with fuel companies who wanted these standards lowered so they could bring in cheaper fuel from Asia. I don’t think they were ready for a Minister who not only had a science background but an ability to retain and recall the minutest detail as he forensically interrogated their proposal.

As WA’s first “consumer protection” Minister, John turned around the former Ministry of Fair Trading’s laissez faire attitude to consumer rights and introduced much needed reforms including the licensing of motor vehicle repairers and legislation to protect the rights of long term residents of residential parks.

John was incredibly kind and even tempered man.

Minister Roberts has already told this story, but I will repeat it —

Although the 2001 election was in February, Parliament did not sit again until May 2001 so the administration staff in the office, the majority of whom had continued on from the office of former Minister Mike Board, had only ever known “office John” not “Parliament John”. It took until the second day of Parliament for one of the staff to come rushing into my office to tell me that there was a problem at Parliament and that I needed to get up there quickly. When I was asked what was wrong I was told “The Minister is shouting at people!” Which he wasn’t, it was just his Parliament voice, but it was such a difference from the John that they knew that they assumed something terrible was happening.

John’s patience extended widely and I do not think many people went away from a meeting with John without believing that they had been listened to and understood, even if they knew that their representations weren’t necessarily going to be successful. This patience even extended to the time I managed to the lock the keys in the boot of his car while we were in Collie and had to wait an hour or so for someone to come from Bunbury to get them out.

That is a dig at me, by the way, Mr Speaker! —

I’m not sure all the Ministers I have worked for would have reacted as calmly ...

The other thing I remember about those country trips was that John much preferred to be the driver rather than a passenger and I think that typifies the way that I remember him, as an activist Minister driving change that was always aimed at improving people’s lives and opportunities. I don’t think anyone could ever say that John Kobelke was a passenger.

It is a hallmark of the man that, over the years, John had many loyal and long-serving staff members. Particularly of note was his electorate officer Ann Roberts, who is here today with her husband Geoff, and who worked for John for many years. We can all think of colleagues, past and present, who have had high turnovers of staff and who did not inspire the same level of loyalty and respect from staff that John could.

At his funeral, fellow Doubleview parishioner and friend Mr Richard Goodwin highlighted John’s work in the local parish community. He said —

The death of John Kobelke last weekend is a deep loss to Doubleview parish, and over many years his work for the Church and in the wider community was highly valued.

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As a parishioner, John displayed the same qualities that endeared him to many people during his public life: decency, humanity, wisdom and humility: people from all walks of life found him friendly and approachable.

He quietly and effectively supported numerous causes, living his faith among us—his passing leaves us the poorer.

Of course, former Treasurer and cabinet colleague Eric Ripper relied heavily upon John to keep a rein on expenditure as an energetic member of the Expenditure Review Committee. Eric said of John —

John was a wonderful colleague—loyal, dependable and wise. Leaders often gave him sensitive jobs like restoring fairness to our industrial relations and worker compensation laws in 2001.

He was committed to and acted on his Catholic social justice principles all his adult life.

That last comment is a segue to an important aspect of John’s life—his faith. John never proselytised, but was comfortable that his beliefs coincided with fundamental Labor values. John stood for something and had the courage of his convictions, and those whose lives he touched knew that.

In his homily at John’s funeral, Monsignor Kevin Long observed —

Looking around the congregation, we see men and women who shared John’s human pilgrimage: I’m sure there are many West Coast Eagles and East Perth supporters here in the congregation, sailing friends, fellow members of the Lions Club, St Vincent de Paul, the Ruah Community, Catholic Education, and perhaps most significantly, members of John’s beloved Labor Party. John Kobelke was surely a true believer in the values and aspirations of the Labour Movement.

What can we say about John’s faith? It is always difficult to examine and identify the contours of someone’s inner life. We are all so complex. John believed that his Christian Faith was the God given source of his profound personal strength. Here was a man of deep but not unquestioning faith. John had an inquiring and intelligent faith which saw him fully involved in so many aspects of Catholic life. Once when I met John while Simon was a student at St Thomas More College, John suggested in his gentle and persuasive way that the clergy might be better not to open their mouths on certain subjects.

In living his Catholic faith, John was neither bigoted nor sectarian. Neither was he blind to the imperfections, foibles and human weaknesses of his coreligionists, but for them and for anyone else who seemed to be acting badly, John would always try to offer some word of excuse to explain their fractured humanity. His faith was authentic and attractive.

My enduring memory of John Kobelke is that he was indefatigable—a person of integrity. He was kind, reliable and diligent. I will long remember his declaratory flourishes in Parliament, and an enduring memory will be his powerful advocacy, dogged persistence and eye for detail. Despite his heavy ministerial duties, he never failed to assist local constituents with problems of the most Byzantine proportions. I encountered John at Mirrabooka not long after he retired. He was working enthusiastically at a tent of a Lions club sausage sizzle. He reeled off an impressive list of activities that he had been involved in post-Parliament. One of these was that he and Stephanie had taken on the role of training assistance dogs. He bemoaned the fact that they were under strict instructions to not show these dogs too much affection!

I also fondly recall when, as a minister, John would visit his mum, who was in aged care in Wembley. His mum had dementia and inexplicably thought John was a train driver, rather than a minister of the Crown. John would be asked at each visit how the train driving was going; the loving son never disabused his mum of her belief, but instead would humbly respond by saying things like, “The 7.03 from Mandurah ran late this morning”!

I extend my condolences to John’s much-loved Stephanie; to his sons, Carl, Simon and Andrew, of whom he was so proud; his daughter-in-law, Hope; and grandchildren, Kate and Harrison.

Vale, friend and colleague. Your legacy is rich and enduring. You touched so many lives. We are all the better for having known you.

**MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth)** [1.16 pm]: I did not know John Kobelke as well as the other people who have spoken today, but I was elected and came into this place in 2005. My main memory of John is of when he was Leader of the House. The Premier is right; he was a very safe pair of hands. Nothing much went wrong on his watch. It was interesting to hear the member for Girrawheen talking about deputations he received as a minister; they would leave the meeting feeling that they had been listened to. At the end of the day, nothing was going to happen, but he would give them the feeling that what they were saying was important. I had the same experience, because I was shadow Minister for Road Safety, a portfolio that our then leader, Matt Birney, had created in opposition. John was then Minister for Police, and I would bring motions to the house because the road toll was rising and we

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thought, “This government’s doing nothing.” We would all speak to the motion and then Minister Kobelke would get up and say, “The member makes some very good points, and I agree with a lot of the things he is saying; it is a problem”, and I would be thinking, “I’m half a chance here!” He would keep going, but then he would say, “However, we will be now amending the motion”, and he would amend it to say what a great job the government was doing, even though the road toll was rising, and the amended motion would go through!

John was a good politician and he handled the job very well. I did not have a lot to do with him in his capacity as Minister for Sport and Recreation, because Trevor Sprigg was our shadow sport minister, but I do remember a couple of stories about him and his booming voice. If there were a competition for booming voices in the Labor ranks, I reckon Norm Marlborough would almost match him, but John was also a fierce debater. From memory, he was always at his best on Wednesday afternoons during private members’ time. Opposition members would speak for most of the three hours on a very important matter and John would just come out on behalf of the government and bat us all away. It was that booming voice that really put the opposition back where it belonged. On one occasion, a female shadow minister—I will not name her—was continuing to interject and John Kobelke said, “You’re squawking. All you do is squawk—squawk, squawk, squawk.” Then she interjected again and he said, “Squawk—you’ve squawked again” and the voice was just so powerful that she had to give up in the finish.

He was a great debater. He was obviously very diligent in how he handled being a member of Parliament. I have learnt a bit about him today. He taught at my old school, John Curtin College of the Arts, as did the member for Midland. I did know her back then. Where was I?

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** All I can say is that I am sure that the members of John’s family would be very pleased today to hear what his colleagues have said about him. My condolences on your loss.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [1.21 pm]: I also rise to contribute to this condolence motion for Hon John Kobelke, one of the nicest people ever to grace the floor of this chamber. Although I knew who John was, I did not personally meet him until the by-election in 2010 for the seat of Armadale. John, of course, was a sitting member then and he came out to help me doorknock one afternoon for about three or four hours. I was very grateful that he came to assist and I thanked him and thought that would be the last I would see of him, but, no, he came back again and again. No sitting member of Parliament at that time helped me as much as John Kobelke did at the by-election. When I was elected, John, who was still the member for Balcatta, provided great guidance for a new member on how to navigate the procedures of Parliament and also how to deal with the electoral allowance, motor vehicle allowance, taxation implications and so forth. I never asked for that advice; he offered that advice. When I became Chair of the Public Accounts Committee after the election of the McGowan government in March 2017, John once again contacted me and we sat down and he provided great guidance and advice on how to be a chair and how to get the most out of the Public Accounts Committee.

To Stephanie, Simon, Carl, Andrew and your other family members, thank you very much for sharing John with me, my colleagues and his constituents for so many years. Of course, my sincere condolences for the loss of your John. John Kobelke was truly a beautiful, caring, loving person—a real gentleman. Vale, John Kobelke—a beautiful man whom we will severely miss.

**MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka)** [1.23 pm]: There are people in your life who have been on your life journey for a long period of time and John was one of those people for me. I started at Scarborough Senior High School in 1978 and he was one of my maths teachers during my time there. I understand that he met the love of his life at Scarborough high school. Stephanie, my deepest sympathies and sadness at the loss of John. There is a Scarborough high school Facebook site for the years 1978 to 1982. John finished at Scarborough high school in 1983, so he was there for that period. There were many tributes on the Facebook page from those who remembered him as a great teacher. One of the quotes was: “He was one of the few teachers that made maths interesting.” One particular student, Robyn Loomes, said, “He was the only reason I passed yr 10 and 11 maths. Awesome teacher.” When I went to functions with John, we would be talking to people and I would often say, “He was my maths teacher. My maths isn’t very good!” That was not the case. He was a great teacher.

He was a great champion of my political involvement before I ran for Parliament and he was a great champion of my participation in the party when I came to Parliament. He always welcomed me into party forums and made me aware of how party forums operated. He included me and made me feel that Labor was the party for me because it championed the social justice issues that I held deeply. He certainly supported me in my campaign to become the member for Nollamara. I was really proud in 2008 to be elected as the member for Nollamara. John had made being the member for Nollamara his, so it was really quite hard to be the member for Nollamara. I would turn up

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 August 2019]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Terry Redman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Terry Healy; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr David Templeman; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Roger Cook; Mr David Michael;  
Speaker

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at different events in different communities and say that I was the member for Nollamara and they would say, “Where’s John? Where’s he gone? What’s happened? Has he retired?” and I would have to point out, “No; he’s now the member for Balcatta.”

Like many people here, I worked with him on many campaigns. I was involved in many quiz nights with him and learnt about the eight-day raffle from him, which, as people in this place will know, I still use to great advantage. He has left quite big shoes to fill. When I became the candidate for the seat of Nollamara, my partner and I bought a house in Nollamara, and I duly went and told John that I had bought a house in Nollamara and was settling into the community. He then asked me what street it was on and I found that it was across the road from the house that he and Stephanie had owned in Nollamara. The members of the community that I had become part of were well and truly used to having a member of Parliament living in their community, and they also send all their love and condolences. I walk my dog regularly and, after John passed, many of the neighbours commented on what a great man he was.

I shared an office with John from about 2010 to 2013. He was a great man to share an office with. People have talked about him being a great mentor. He shared his knowledge. We had many great discussions. I always admired his organisational capacity. In his Balcatta electorate office, there was a whiteboard calendar-year planner that had all the events that were going on and I remember thinking that he had a great organisational capacity that I really admired. In the time that we shared an office, we had quite a few philosophical discussions. We held different views about life in many ways, but it showed his depth of faith that we were always able to be respectful and communicate with honesty and openness and that made us appreciate each other’s perspectives. That made John a special person.

I want to go back to when we were at school. I exercise with someone else who went to Scarborough high school and today I said to him, “Ross, can you remember John Kobelke?” and he said that he remembered the computing classes. We know from the Premier that John introduced computing at Scarborough Senior High School through a commonwealth innovation grant. I remember those computer classes and I remember how excited we were. I can also remember filling out the cards and the binary system—zero and one—that we had to mark all the time. That was his memory as well. It is funny what we remember when we start thinking about it.

I became an expert in workers’ compensation in the union movement and that was the result of the respect that John Kobelke gave me when he redrafted the workers’ compensation legislation and I was part of the negotiations on that new legislation. He gave me great respect and consideration of representing workers’ perspectives about how this system applied to workers and the impact it had on them so that many of the changes that we were able to negotiate benefited workers. We had a difference of opinion on how much workers were given in benefits, but I suppose I was a union official with a particular perspective. In our time sitting in the office downstairs, he said to me years later when he saw that the premiums had gone so low that perhaps I may have had some legitimacy in my argument, so that was really great. I remember he was so excited to find out that he was to have a grandchild. It was something so important in his life.

We used to meet at the Nollamara Sports and Recreation Club or at the Lions club. I did not go to the club meetings as much as him, and I was told off! We saw each other at the Lions Australia Day celebration at Des Penman Memorial Reserve in Nollamara and Harmony Day, cooking sausages, and the Christmas cake sales at the Dianella shops. He was a member of Lions for 18 years, and I know that Lions absolutely appreciated him. The club sought to ensure that he was recognised and he received the Melvin Jones Fellowship for dedicated humanitarian service, which was named after the secretary-treasurer of Lions Clubs International and is a really prestigious award. Unfortunately, the dedication did not come until after his death and it was presented at the wake, but it shows how much the Lions appreciated him. I am told that he was helping the club draft a new constitution and a couple of weeks before he got very ill, he still turned up at the Lions club meeting to ensure that he had finished the job and fulfilled his responsibility. As the member for Girrawheen said, that was the kind, reliable and diligent man that John Kobelke was.

The Nollamara Sports and Recreation Club, despite me becoming the member for Nollamara, was not going to let him go as a patron. I had to become the vice-patron because he was still a very important person in that club. Other members of Parliament might have thought that was a bit odd, but that seemed perfectly natural to me because John was such a stalwart of the community. I found out recently that he was the patron of that club for 29 years.

In the 2008 election, as the member for Girrawheen would remember, we shared the post-election party in Balga at the Balga Community Centre, and I can remember the tense wait to see whether he had been successfully returned in what was not a great election for the Labor Party in many respects. It was very close, but his great campaigning and dedication to his community won that vote. I also acknowledge that he worked really hard in

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2013 for Janet Pettigrew, the candidate for Balcatta. He worked for the benefit of the party and the WA people. Even though he could have retired, he worked tirelessly on that campaign.

He would see the irony in that when I posted on my Facebook about his passing, I received over 1 212 hits. The irony is that he was still supporting a member of Parliament at that time. I want to note a couple of the comments. Khamis Tombe from the southern Sudanese community talked about his strong friendship with them and the advocacy that he had for them. Suresh Rajan, who is a strong community member and a strong advocate for multiculturalism, said —

When JVT undertook his urban terrorism many years ago, John Kobelke was the first person on the phone to me to wish me well.

He was a man who really understood the community he represented and we are much poorer for his loss. Ruah Community Services said that he was —

A respected statesman, dedicated community worker, educator and champion of many.

My deepest sympathy to Stephanie, Simon, Hope, Carl, Emily, Andrew, Ella, Ann and Geoff. Stephanie at one stage pointed out that John's mistress was his boat and she was trying to work out whether Ann was maybe a second wife. Ann was very welcoming of me when I became the member for Nollamara and we really will miss him. About two weeks before John died, I met Rosie in the shopping centre at Mirrabooka and gave her a lift home and she told me that he was very sick and I was very concerned about that. I know that everyone who worked in the office with John would be very sad about his passing. May he rest in peace.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [1.36 pm]: My first memories of John Kobelke was when I was a fresh-faced research officer working for Geoff Gallop in 1997, working away in the bore water-stained demountable known as the "Summer Palace". I remember the spritely, energetic and ever-so-pleasant member of Parliament coming up to the office to talk spreadsheets, statistics and accountability. John and I worked together in those hard days of opposition. We knew numbers. He knew numbers; I knew numbers. He knew spreadsheets; I knew spreadsheets. We were the nerdy spreadsheets guys who would compare our analyses and statistics of the government's performance. He would always walk up with the laptop ready with his spreadsheet to ask me my views on his analysis. Sometimes I disagreed but he was adamant he was always right anyway, so it did not really matter! With my Treasury background, we worked very, very closely and he was so pleasant. It was such a refreshing thing as a research officer to have a member of Parliament who was so engaging and keen to work with me on my journey from research officer to where I am now. As I said, he was always willing to do the work and get his hands dirty, and he was completely across his material.

When we won government in 2001, John Kobelke played a key role as Leader of the House, Expenditure Review Committee member and a key minister implementing significant change. Being involved in the ERC and parliamentary strategy, I worked with him quite closely. He was incredible to watch. ERC used to meet every Wednesday morning and normally started very, very early. As a staff member, I would rock up to see John Kobelke sitting there with his file open, across the material and ready to go, despite often being in this chamber until the early hours of the same morning.

As was outlined by the member for Girrawheen, John Kobelke was involved in a lot of significant change and reform. He had to deal with the union movement and particular unions. He had to deal with big business for FuelWatch, but he worked so hard for the public interest and he was so tough in his negotiations for the entire community. He was also the ultimate team player and as a minister, as we all have learnt, sometimes we have to do things for the team. John always accepted this. I remember that when he had to do something he was not uncomfortable with, but he thought could have a negative reaction, he would say, "I know this is going to be deeply unpopular, but I will do it. I will be shouted at and torn apart, but that is okay." That is the type of person he was and he would do it with a bit of a grin, like he enjoyed the battle and the competition.

As leader of government business and as a staff member, we were involved in a lot of discussions about tactics and strategy. I used to love hearing his point of view and I knew that he was a very tough operator. He was often quite stubborn, but he was very tough in how he negotiated. When I became his parliamentary colleague, John and I worked together on the Public Accounts Committee. His chairing of the meetings again was exemplary and his dedication to the work was unrivalled.

I will now talk about his commitment to his community, as discussed by others. I always remember one discussion we had when I think we were looking at an energy utility. He was explaining how he had been walking the streets a couple of nights earlier and noticed that a light was out on the street. He was following this matter up with as

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much rigour and effort as I have seen from any local member who follows up an issue. This was after many years of being a local member. He was still as passionate as ever about seeking out community issues.

On a personal note, John also went that extra distance. When my first daughter was born, I remember receiving a beautiful gift from him and Steph. I remember seeing him at many Italian functions. Even after he retired from politics, he was very closely connected to the Italian community. He was a strong friend and supporter of the Italian community. I do not say this in a condescending way. He was a true friend of the community and someone who understood the aspirations and the needs of the Italian community. He worked closely with the Sicilian club in particular in his electorate and across the entire community.

When I became a minister and needed someone to chair the Swan Valley planning review, I sought out John Kobelke. I knew his eye for detail, his ability to work with everyone across the community and to understand people's concerns, his empathy and his genuine love of policy made him the ideal person. I remember discussing his appointment with him when he said, "Rita, I don't want to be paid for the work I'm going to do." We negotiated something, but that was the type of person he was. He volunteered his time and effort for the government. It was just incredible. It is with great sadness that I have not been able to implement his recommendations as yet. In time, we will announce our response to the John Kobelke report on the Swan Valley planning review. He should be proud of the work that he did and the fact that his research, his analysis and his recommendations are something that I have truly supported and will carry forward. He was simply a joy to be around. He was a genuinely good person who loved his job and loved the community.

I really appreciate the fact that I got to work with him in so many capacities. On hearing about his death I was very sad. It has impacted me greatly. I looked at the amount of time and the different capacities in which I worked with him—as a staff member in opposition, a staff member in government and a parliamentary colleague, and in my role now. It has been a huge journey and, as I said, I have learnt a lot from him—his toughness and his ability to just keep going. Like I said, the work that he put in in those early years of government was just incredible. He was involved in tough industrial relations negotiations and in setting up FuelWatch and dealing with petrol companies. It was very, very tough for him, but he did it with good grace, diligence and a commitment to the public interest. As I said, he was a safe pair of hands. You could always rely on John Kobelke.

I attended John's funeral, like many members here did. I was impressed by the beautiful words from his children and grandchildren. Steph, your endless love for him and your respect for each other has been incredible to watch. John Kobelke touched the lives and we will miss him very much.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House)** [1.43 pm]: I will speak briefly. Firstly of all I will pass on my condolences to the Kobelke family, to John's former staff, his close friends and those in the gallery here for the condolence motion today. Condolence motions are a very important acknowledgement in this Parliament for people who have served their community. Some people who have the privilege of serving in this chamber do so for a short time and others for a long time, but it is an important time to reflect on those who choose to make contributions to their community over and above the normal demands of life. John Kobelke was a former Leader of the House. As the current Leader of the House, there is no better example to reflect on than the way in which John Kobelke carried out the role of the Leader of the House in this chamber. Indeed, during the early years of the Gallop government, particularly for those of us who were elected during that period, the importance of the leadership shown by John Kobelke in that capacity was very important. We were seeking to pass important legislation through this place and we relied on people like John to be an important role model.

John, Stephanie and the family had a great affiliation with Mandurah, where I live. I know that they have had a holiday home there for a long time. I vividly remember seeing John around 1999—before I was elected to this place—when the Estuary Bridge had not long been open. John was fishing or crabbing with his family underneath that bridge. I think his sons would have been quite young then. It is always interesting when you see somebody out of a suit or what you would normally see them wearing. He was still wearing his very floppy hat that he was famous for—always conscious of the sun. Of course, John had quite skinny legs and he had these shorts on, but he also had this booming voice, as we all know. I was only the deputy mayor at the time—a councillor—and he knew me because I was involved in the Labor Party. I remember looking at him and did not quite recognise him until he said with his booming voice, "David, how are you? Good to see you." He had a wonderful way of connecting with people from all sorts of backgrounds.

The one word that always comes up when I think of John Kobelke is "decent". He was a decent human being. Many of us attended his funeral. Sadly, at funerals we quite often learn more things about a person than we knew before. The touching and pertinent contributions by all those who spoke at John's funeral, including his sons, the member for Midland and others, captured beautifully the wonderful life of a wonderful person whom I consider to

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[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 August 2019]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Terry Redman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Terry Healy; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr David Templeman; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Roger Cook; Mr David Michael;  
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have been a tremendously decent human being. I pass on my condolences to all the family and I acknowledge sincerely the tremendous contribution that he made to not only his family primarily, of course, but also the broader Western Australian community, his electorate and the many friends, associates and colleagues who he forged a relationship with. We will miss him, but we will remember him as a tremendously decent person.

**MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands — Deputy Speaker)** [1.48 pm]: I do not have a huge relationship to relate to family members here about my friendship with John. I met him in 2008 when I was first elected. But Stephanie, Simon, Carl and Andrew, I can share with you a couple of things about someone who I thought to be a really great man. I happened to sit next to him in my first term in this house, so members can appreciate that I do not have to make any comment about how loud his voice was. It took me until my second term to get the hearing back in that ear.

He was an absolutely remarkable politician and debater. I consider it a great privilege to have sat next to him, even though my ear did suffer a bit! Just to see him work on the floor of Parliament was truly amazing. He could take up any subject. He would be worrying about some detail while other speakers were on their feet and chatting to me about it, and then he would say, “I have to say something, I have to say something”, and he would jump to his feet and that was it—the floor was just completely his for the time he was on his feet. He spoke with such passion and such timbre. He was a really remarkable man.

Stephanie, I am not surprised that you guys were looking after and training assistance dogs, because you both have that amazing generosity of spirit. That is wonderful.

I did not know that John went to primary school at St Columba’s in Bayswater. If anyone ever wanted a good grounding for being an outstanding politician, coming from Bayswater has to be a good place to start! That is outstanding.

I should fess up; I got to know John in a number of capacities prior to 2008, when I was running the Western Australian Council of Social Service and he was Minister for Labour Relations; Employment and Training. I would go to see him and lobby on behalf of the community sector for various reforms. There were reforms around indexation for the community sector and training of community sector workers. In the industrial arena, there were issues to do with pay and conditions. I always remember my very first meeting with him. It was when Susan Lewis was his chief of staff; she is someone whom I got to know and become friendly with as well. I approached that meeting with a bit of trepidation, because I had not really had much to do with Western Australian government ministers prior to my WACOSS days. He was such a small-framed man. He sat back quietly and listened to what we were saying. He listened to the campaign and to the strategies and then delivered a really, really beautiful and wise assessment of what we were saying. As members have heard today, I went away thinking, “Gee, he really listened to me; isn’t that great!” Now, nothing changed, but I knew he had listened to me, and I was confident that when the occasion arose, he would go in to bat for the things that the community sector needed and wanted at the time.

When I sat next to him in my first year here in 2008, I could not quite figure out, probably like most politicians, what was going on in the house. One thing I noticed was that he had a little booklet and a pen during question time. This is for members over there, if they do not know about this. If nobody is doing this, take note. I asked John, after about two months in this place, what he was doing during question time, and he said that he was keeping track of the time it took for ministers to answer questions. I went, “What?” He said, “I’m keeping a record, and then I take all this information and put it in a graph and we talk about it in our caucus.” For goodness sake; what a man of detail! I was so impressed by that. When we later heard that the Labor opposition at the time was complaining about ministers filibustering and dragging out their answers—do not laugh on the other side of the house!—we had the facts at hand thanks to John Kobelke, an amazing, tough, principled man.

To our now Leader of the Opposition, the member for Scarborough, I, too, went to the ethics and values training that John Kobelke ran for all of us. This might sound funny, but I kept in my wallet the little card that he gave us that told us how to make a values-based decision. It was three short steps. I kept it with me for the first two terms and lost it only when we got into government! I do not know whether that says something, but I am sure John would appreciate that.

John was a quiet man whom I had the great privilege to get to know a little during the years that we spent together in this Parliament and in the years before that, when he was a tough and principled negotiator on behalf of the government as a minister. To that small quiet man with a very loud voice, I say: I will miss you, John. Thank you.

**MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie — Parliamentary Secretary)** [1.54 pm]: It is a real honour to speak to the condolence motion for John Kobelke. It was my great fortune to be on the Public Accounts Committee in the thirty-eighth Parliament with now Minister Saffioti and John as the Chair of that committee. We were in opposition, obviously, from September 2008. I will come to some of the things John taught me about good governance and holding government to account, but before I do so, I want to speak about John as an exemplary parliamentarian.

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I learnt from him the difference between being a politician and a parliamentarian. John loved, and excelled at, both those roles, but there is a difference and it is not always understood. To observe John in action was to see how that difference can play out.

John's hardworking nature, sense of duty and tremendous intellect enabled him to use Parliament to great effect. He did it without resorting to gimmickry; rather, he used well-reasoned, well-researched and clearly put arguments. He was an exceptional mentor to me and many others—to those of us in the class of 2008 and other waves of new parliamentarians, and across the chamber as well. He saw the need for members to access professional development like other professionals do. He helped us to access ethics training to augment and support our own values and beliefs so that we could be stronger in our own decision-making and positioning. John's legacy is indeed enormous, but especially in the dignity he brought to the role of parliamentarian. I recall the polite but firm interrogation to which John would subject bureaucrats and business leaders as we inquired into various Public Accounts Committee matters. He was always respectful and calm, but dogged. His steel-trap mind and his maths teacher precision meant that questions were put, considered and then dissected. He taught me the value of following the money and of how to test and probe the validity of government decision-making. He taught me about such things as public sector comparators and doing the full value-for-money test. Memorable were the times that John's voice would boom around this chamber. He used his voice in such a way. I do not think he ever wanted to belittle—it was not John's parliamentary style to belittle. It was about seeking the truth, exposing an issue or putting something into context. He did all he could to gain the best for all Western Australians, and I acknowledge the tremendous contribution he made.

On a committee together, members get to travel around a bit. I recall the little national park near Kununurra that is sometimes described as the mini Bungle Bungles. John, with his famous sunwise hat, was walking around very fast. I thought, "This guy's very fit!" I was wondering whether there was almost a degree of competitiveness in it, but I then realised that John was competing with and pushing himself. That is another hallmark of John's character—he was always pushing himself. Mirima National Park is just one of the very fond memories I have of the times I spent with John. He really was a giant of this place. My deepest condolences to Stephanie, Simon, Carl and Andrew and all John's close family and friends. Vale, John Kobelke.

**MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley)** [1.58 pm]: Being around this house and the Labor Party for many years as a teenager and young adult, I met many impressive and wonderful members of Parliament. One of these was John Kobelke. I remember him as a quiet and smiling man who seemed to be kind to everyone. One of the things that struck me about John was his generosity. This was further enforced after the class of 2017 was elected. John continued to give back to our party by offering his time to help train, guide and advise the newly elected MPs. This was not lost on us, and we were very grateful to, and a little in awe of, this man who had served our party and Western Australia for so long. His honest and direct advice was invaluable to the fresh-faced new members of Parliament.

I am sure that many former members of this place who served with John would like to pay tribute to him. Today I have a few words from one, Jackie McKiernan, who said to me, "John's life after politics was, in my view, about ensuring he gave back to the community." He and his wife, Stephanie, were always seen before Christmas at Dianella shopping centre—and I am sure many others—selling Christmas cakes for Lions Clubs Australia. John was also a very active justice of the peace and was part of the City of Stirling's roster at various signing centres. He was a truly loved man, who was generous with his time and always prepared to listen.

He had an early tilt at preselection before he was preselected for Nollamara. He stood for the seat of Scarborough but was pipped at the post by the eventual member, the late Graham Burkett. In many ways, he was a quiet achiever. John became secretary to cabinet when Carmen Lawrence first became Premier. These are my memories of John Kobelke. He will be missed.

Vale, John.

Members: Hear, hear!

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Parliamentary Secretary)** [2.00 pm]: I rise to say a few words on this condolence motion for the very great John Kobelke. He was the member for Nollamara, which is in the electorate I now represent. It is absolutely true, and I echo the words of the member for Mirrabooka, that he was held with very, very deep affection by the people of Nollamara. The member for Mirrabooka and I continue to attend events in Nollamara at which the first thing people ask is, "Where's John?" That is testament to the impact he had on their lives. That happens particularly at the Nollamara Bowling Club, of which he was the patron for many years. I am the current patron of that bowling club and on behalf of the bowling club I pass on my deepest condolences to John's family and thank them for sharing him with our community over those many, many years.

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John remained connected to that community even when he represented another seat and even after he was out of Parliament. As mentioned, he was always active in the Lions Club of Stirling. Not many community events are held in Nollamara, but the annual Australia Day sausage sizzle is always held at Des Penman Reserve. It is usually about 35 degrees at seven o'clock in the morning, but John would always be there, slaving over the barbecues and cooking bacon and eggs for the community. That event was always extremely well attended and he was very unassuming about his role at those events.

I discovered today that we went to the same school for a period. I also attended St Columba's School in Bayswater. It is during these motions and at people's funerals that we learn so much more about people's lives and, in particular in this place, about their relationships. Often it is our relationships that keep us going in this place. It is so refreshing to hear that he had really good and healthy relationships with others across the chamber.

I had known John through the party for many years, but when I was elected to the upper house, I also got a visit from John as the new member for the East Metropolitan Region. He provided lots of very helpful advice and continued to be a really important source of advice for me. Not many people will know this, but when I was preselected as the candidate to run for Morley, I asked John if he would be my campaign director. He did not even take a breath and just said no. I tried not to take it personally, because I respected the fact that John had made a decision to spend more time with his family and his boat. As politicians, our families have to share us for a very long time. I am really glad that his family did not have to share John in those very last few years.

He was very supportive of my move to the lower house and was very kind about the risk that I was taking to win a seat so Labor could win government. He continued to provide really helpful advice. That advice was from someone who had had an accomplished career, never had a hint of ego and was always very well intended. Despite coming from different parts of the party and often having very different views on a number of issues, he rose above all that. He was very genuine, gracious and supportive in his advice. That is a rarity in this field.

He continued to give back to the party that gave to him. That was a testament to his personality. He continued to support people through their ethical training and professional development, and he was genuinely a heavy lifter for not just the Labor Party, but the whole labour movement. We do not come into contact with many of these people in our lives and careers. With the most heartfelt condolences to his family, and on behalf of the community I now have the honour to represent, we are very, very sorry that John is no longer with us.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health)** [2.05 pm]: I want to make some very brief remarks on the condolence motion for John Kobelke. It is not surprising that so many members have got up today to share their memories and provide best wishes to John's family. These memories are not only fresh; they run deep. John was an extraordinary contributor to not only this place, but also the Labor Party generally.

I was not familiar with John as a young man or as a young party activist. I was from the south; he was from the north. But I was sent to the northern suburbs to work on a campaign as a young activist and told to report to John Kobelke, whom I did not know. I knew of him by a new title that I learnt from the member for Midland today—the "holy rollers". I was thinking, "What could I possibly have in common with him and how is this going to go?" I remember rolling up to John's office and being welcomed openly by John and Ann. I was treated with respect, great integrity and unity, because we had a commitment to the Labor Party and all those differences mattered not. John was a true gentleman of the party—someone who understood conviction and purpose and also that we are here together to do good. He was a great mentor not only through that experience but also once I came to this place in 2008 with the member for West Swan and others. By that stage, John had decided to step back from the frontbench, but he had not stepped away from his role to mentor young members of Parliament. He had a commitment to excellence. He had a commitment to professionalism. He wanted to make sure that new members were taken on a program to learn the dark art of being a member of Parliament. He was incredibly effective at that. "Effectiveness" is the other word that comes to mind because, my God, he was loud and so effective at communicating his message! We could all learn from John about how to carry ourselves as a decent person, as someone who has moral conviction and who is here to do good and also be mightily effective. I will always take with me the lessons that I learnt from him about speechmaking, about dealing with other people in a decent fashion and about understanding that people have issues they want to bring to you and to have heard.

As I said, my contribution will be short, but I wanted to say I have very deep and rich memories of my time in here with John. What I will remember most of all is the time after he left Parliament when I would see him and Stephanie at various art events, whether it was the opera or the symphony orchestra. There I saw a couple who were in their element of joy and happiness, and who were really appreciating the opportunity offered by those things.

To Stephanie and family, to Ann and Geoff, thank you very much for the great association. Our fondest thoughts to you all. May John rest in peace.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 August 2019]

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Speaker

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Members: Hear, hear!

**MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta)** [2.09 pm]: As the member for Balcatta, it is with great sadness that I rise today to make a contribution to the condolence motion for the previous Labor member for Balcatta, Hon John Kobelke. John's significant contribution to Western Australia has been outlined by many members this afternoon. Before entering this place, he was a teacher, a unionist and an activist. In this place, he was Leader of the House and served as a minister in consecutive Labor governments. In retirement, he mentored many new members of Parliament and always took the time to share his knowledge and wisdom on the art of politics. Today, I want to focus on John's work as a local member for the electorates of Nollamara and, from 2005 to 2013, Balcatta.

Working for my local member at the time, Bob Kucera, in the adjoining seat of Yokine, I first got to know John and his office during the 2004 federal election campaign and then in the lead-up to the 2005 state campaign when the much-needed one vote, one value reforms saw John's seat of Nollamara moved west and renamed Balcatta, and Yokine gain a large portion of John's seat. I remember the handover of local matters John and his electorate office were working on. I remember how involved and intertwined John seemed to be in a whole host of local groups and their issues. It struck me that John was not a run-of-the-mill local member. It also struck me that if he saw a local injustice or problem, or one was brought to his attention, he was not the kind of person to let the issue go until it was resolved.

A few months later, I was elected to the City of Stirling and with my ward being nearly wholly within the seat of Balcatta, I continued to work with John on local issues. During this time, we worked together on drains, intersections, speed humps, parks and playgrounds, footpaths and other local infrastructure that our community called for and needed. John would regularly write to a local area with a survey asking if a street supported the installation of a footpath, needed their laneway cleaned up or if they would like their local park and playground upgraded. As a local councillor, I would receive a letter from John with a copy of the survey results and I would use the results to fight for these projects at a City of Stirling budget meeting that made a difference to people's day-to-day lives in their community. As soon as these projects were funded and delivered, I would receive another letter from John and, together, we would start our advocacy again. I thought that John's letters and his support for these local issues was a sign of a member who truly cared for our community. John would also hold regular morning teas and meetings around the electorate. He would always invite me as the local councillor. His community events would always draw a reasonable crowd. Rather than speak at his constituents, he would seat them in a circle and ask them one by one to let him know what their issues were. He would listen. It is something that I have always admired in John and something I think we as politicians need to do more of—listen.

Since John's passing, many local residents and community groups have commented to me of their respect for John, for what he did and for the support he gave our local community. We still have people coming to the office to see whether John could witness their will, to borrow John's engraving machine or to seek his help with an issue he had previously been involved in. Just yesterday, the member for Mount Lawley was telling me that he was recently doorknocking in Dianella, which was once part of John's electorate of Nollamara, and a resident commented that Simon had been the first member to doorknock the area since John. She went on to say that John had arranged a new streetlight following their conversation, and that they still refer to it as the "John Kobelke light pole".

I know John always supported the multicultural communities of our electorate, especially the Italian, Croatian and Macedonian groups of Balcatta. I think it was mentioned before, but every year—it will be in a couple of weeks—the Sicilian Club ball is held in Balcatta and, to this day, John's performance in winning the major prize in the raffle at those balls every year remains club folklore. I am sure there are few TVs in the Kobelke household that might have come from the Sicilian Club raffle.

Fast-forward to the 2017 state election. I will be forever indebted to John for his support, advice and counsel. I will always remember the many weekday afternoons John spent doorknocking with me, especially in the suburb of Balcatta. Some days I would have to go off to an event or a City of Stirling council meeting and the like, and John would just keep going, not wanting to leave a street unfinished. Since the election, John was never a stranger and would pop into the office from time to time, especially to work on continuing the Stirling Carols by Candlelight that he had established and run, with local churches and volunteers, for many years in Tuart Hill. It was only a few months ago that John was working with my office on this year's event. I will proudly continue supporting and facilitating this event in his honour.

I know John also continued his volunteering with other groups, including cooking sausages for the Lions Club of Stirling. He certainly was one of the busiest retirees I have met! In John's 2012 valedictory speech he said —

I have certainly enjoyed working for the people in the electorate. We are incredibly privileged ... not only can we help people find their way through the bureaucratic system, and that is rewarding, but also so

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 7 August 2019]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Terry Redman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Terry Healy; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John McGrath; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr David Templeman; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Roger Cook; Mr David Michael;  
Speaker

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often we will have people come into our offices and reveal to their member of Parliament incredibly personal matters because they are just reaching out for help. That they will place that trust in me and other members I find very humbling and a great privilege, but there is also a responsibility to try to assist in dealing with those matters.

John did this and more, along with his electorate office staff. Can I offer my condolences to Ann Roberts, John's long-term electorate officer, as well as Lida Feist, Karen Stacey and Ken McCallum, who worked so hard helping John help others. Testament to their joint work was what I remember as the very, very impressive bank of filing cabinets that filled his office, full of the many names and issues John and his team assisted with.

To Stephanie and John's sons and family and friends, I will always feel privileged to have known John, and to have had the opportunity to follow him as a Labor member for Balcatta. On behalf of Lenda, my family and electorate office, the Balcatta branch and the many local people and groups he assisted and worked for, my condolences for your loss. Vale, John Kobelke.

**THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson)** [2.15 pm]: I first came into this chamber in 2001 when I sat on the infamous half-back line with the Attorney General, John Bowler, the late Paul Andrews and Martin Whitely. When backbenchers first get into government, they are not allowed to say much. John Kobelke monitored that very severely us not saying anything. However, when we had sat there for a while, I thought: I'll test him. Every once in a while, the government was trying to get a bill through and we wanted to say a few words when we were not supposed to. We would very quickly hop up and say a few words and all of a sudden, we would see a shadow coming up behind us! It was John.

John taught us a lot about discipline. Maybe it did not work with me in the chamber; I always seemed to be getting into trouble. He talked about discipline in not only the chamber, but also our electorates: "Work hard for your electorate. Look after the people. You're not representing yourself or the Labor Party; you're representing your constituents." I have never forgotten that. I have been around for 18 years now and every time there is an election due, I always remember the words John planted in my head. To all members here today, I think he was a great role model and a great leader. From what I have heard at the funeral and today, he was a great family man.

On behalf of myself and the rest of the chamber, we were very proud to have had John working for not only the Labor Party, but also the government. I also congratulate members for their stamina today sitting through all the speeches! This is the longest condolence motion I have seen in 18 years, and it shows the respect of not only what the man did for the Parliament, but also the community.

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