

HON NORMAN ERIC BAXTER

Condolence Motion

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [10.02 am]: I move without notice -

That this House expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Norman Eric Baxter, a former member of the Legislative Council for the Central Province; and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

I wish to remark on the passing of Hon Norman Eric Baxter, who was first elected as a member for the Central Province in this place in 1950, and went on to serve this Parliament in a number of distinguished roles, including that of Minister for Health and Community Welfare from 1974 to 1975. Hon Norman Eric Baxter had two periods of parliamentary representation: from 1950 to 1958 in the first instance, and later from 1960 to 1983. He was a member of the Country Party - later the National Country Party - for his entire parliamentary career.

I read Hon Norman Eric Baxter's first speech made on 9 August 1950. A reading of that first speech revealed that the honourable member was concerned about the issues of the day in a very practical fashion, and it was that touch of practicality that he brought as a member and a minister to the Parliament of the day. Among other things, immigration was a primary concern, and also the need to ensure the development of the dairy industry to meet the future needs of Perth's consumers. Times certainly change, but the values and the political make-up of our State are partly made of the efforts and work of Hon Norm Baxter. In reading Norman's first speech, I could not help reflecting on how much community attitudes have changed and, in a sense, despite that change, how much things have remained the same, because the issues that were raised by Norm Baxter were influenced by the fact that Australia was at war in Korea in 1950, and the nation was probably at the peak of its concern about the effect of communism in the Asia-Pacific region, in particular, and was coming to terms with the beginning of the immense wave of postwar immigration that we experienced. Read today, some of the attitudes seem somewhat archaic, but we must appreciate that five decades ago the world was a very different place from what it is now. Some of the issues raised by Hon Norm Baxter in that speech have been reflected in current debates concerning asylum seekers. Therefore, while things change, they also remain very much the same. It was certainly an interesting retrospective reading.

I did not know Norm - although I guess I did, in a sense, because he was a member for Central Province, which covered the area in which I lived. However, I probably knew him better as the Minister for Health. There were some tumultuous times during his tenure as the Minister for Health, most notably the Tresillian affair, which involved a hospital in the seat of Nedlands. I recall people talking about Norman - and it was my own experience with him - as somebody who, above all else, was a practical man who certainly had dirt under his fingernails. He understood the ethos and the ethic of people who lived in the country at that time and who, in a sense, reflected the state of Australia at that crucial turning point in the postwar period. He moved on, of course, and I am sure that some of his attitudes would have changed over that time, just as ours have. However, he was a member who served his electorate and the State faithfully and well. I wish to pass on the condolences of the House to his family and his friends. Our thoughts are with them on his passing.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [10.08 am]: I join with the Leader of the House in supporting this condolence motion for the late Hon Norman E. Baxter. Norm Baxter truly had a lifelong commitment to politics and had the distinction of following his father into both the Legislative Council and the ministry. He was a capable Minister for Health and Community Welfare in Sir Charles Court's coalition Government, and is one of only 12 members of the Legislative Council to have given more than 30 years service to the Parliament and to their constituents. In fact, he was a member for 31 years and 15 days.

Norm Baxter was the son of a farmer, Charles Baxter, who in May 1914, at the biennial election for the Legislative Council, was one of the first two representatives of the newly formed Country Party elected to an Australian Parliament. Charles Baxter held his seat in the East Province - later renamed Central Province - unopposed until his death in 1950, and was a minister in coalition Governments from 1917 to 1921 and 1930 to 1933. He was a member of the Legislative Council for 35 years and nine months. Between the two, they were members of this House for 66 years - an incredible achievement for one family.

Raised very much in a political tradition, Norm Baxter was a fellow pupil of Sir Charles Court at the Rosalie Primary School in Shenton Park, and he also farmed at Balingup. He joined the Country Party in 1932, and in 1946 became an organiser for the party. In 1947 he contested the seat of Northam, which in those days was a Labor stronghold held by ALP minister, and later Premier, Bert Hawke. He polled 44 per cent of the votes to lose by 492 votes, the closest result in Northam during Bert Hawke's 35-year tenure of the seat.

Norm Baxter later worked as a credit officer with Wesfarmers, and at the death of his father he contested the by-election vacancy for the Central Province. This consisted of Northam and the strongly rural seats of Toodyay,

Mt Marshall and Avon Valley, and also the near-city seats of Darling Range and Dale. The Liberal Party challenged its coalition partner in contests for the three seats in the province, and Norm Baxter won by 277 out of some 2 900 votes. Although this was an era of the property franchise, elections were hard fought and the voluntary vote could present its own challenge.

In 1952 he was re-elected for a six-year term, but in 1958 he was narrowly defeated by the Liberal candidate Roy Abbey with a margin of 103 votes. Two years later, however, he contested a vacant seat in Central Province and reversed his defeat by a winning margin of more than 800 votes. Subsequently, at the election in 1965 he was returned unopposed. In 1971 Norm Baxter was strongly supported by the electors of the redrawn Central Province that consisted of Mt Marshall, Avon and Northam. Six years later the inclusion of Narrogin in Central Province was no obstacle to his sixth election win. After the 1974 election he was appointed to the demanding portfolio of health and community welfare, and retained his position in the coalition Government the following year when some upheavals caused the National Country Party ministers to resign. His appointment in his sixty-fifth year ranks him as one of the oldest first-time ministers in our State's history.

After the 1977 election Norm Baxter was not re-appointed to the ministry, but only because relative numbers could not justify a third National Country Party minister. Sir Charles Court publicly acknowledged this in thanking him for his contribution. As secretary of the parliamentary National Country Party from 1978 until his retirement from Parliament in 1983, and as a member of significant committees, he continued to make a notable contribution to public life. In retirement he continued to farm at Wundowie and to contribute to community life. In his late 80s Norm Baxter was photographed fighting a severe bushfire that swept through Wundowie and adjoining areas.

On only three occasions in our history have sons followed their fathers into both State Parliament and ministerial office. Norm Baxter deserves to be remembered not only for this, but also for his devoted service to rural electors and the political cause of which his father had been a pioneer.

I was fortunate enough to have served with Norm Baxter for six years between 1977 and 1983. I always found him to be a very dedicated representative of his electorate and a real servant of country Western Australia. He was a stickler for the rules of this place and I recall that he was suspended from the Chamber in 1982 because he refused to withdraw a comment which was adjudged by the Deputy President, who was then Chairman of Committees, to be a reflection on the Chair. The occasion related to the maiden speech of the new member for North Province, whose name I will not mention at this time, and to a number of points of order that were taken by his colleague also from the North Province. As is the tradition of this place, when Hon Norm Baxter refused to withdraw his comments - to my great astonishment, he refused to withdraw - the Leader of the House at the time, Hon Ian Medcalf, moved the suspension motion. As is also the tradition of this place, I was one of those who voted for his suspension, even though I think in retrospect that Hon Norm Baxter was probably making a very good point - I suspect others might agree with me in retrospect as well. That is a reflection of Norm's quite dogmatic approach to politics and his belief that he was right on that occasion; he refused to back down for any purpose at all. That demonstrated that Norm Baxter was a person of substance who believed in what he thought was right and would stand by that. He had a very proud history in this Chamber and, as I said earlier, he and his father made a very significant contribution to politics in Western Australia over a very long time.

On behalf of the Liberal Party I extend my sincere sympathy to the family of Hon Norm Eric Baxter, a faithful servant of the State of Western Australia.

HON MURRAY CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [10.16 am]: I wish to add to the long list of tributes to Hon Norm Baxter, who was a much respected and long-serving member of this Parliament. Norm Baxter was from a farming community in Balingup and he first entered the Western Australian Parliament in 1950 as a member of the Country Party, representing Central Province. Anybody who has been into what is known as the Country Party office would note the recognition of his family over 66 years, which we should all recognise was a contribution to country people of which his family should be very proud.

Throughout his 31 years as a member of Parliament, Norm Baxter stood for the rights of country people and understood the special needs associated with living in the regions. Norman Baxter served on many parliamentary committees during his marathon term, and between April 1974 and May 1975 was the Minister for Health and Community Welfare. Norman Baxter was part of what could be described as a parliamentary dynasty. He had the distinction of being one of only two Western Australian fathers and sons in the Legislative Council to become ministers of the Crown - the others, of course, were B.C. and B.G. Wood.

Norman Baxter and his father, Charles Baxter, have special places in Western Australian history and are both listed as the longest serving members of the Western Australian Parliament. As Hon Norman Moore said, Charles Baxter served for a total of 35 years between 1914 and 1950. Norman Baxter was a man of conviction who said it as it was. His maiden speech on 15 August, for example, was made during the time of the Korean

conflict and he was vehemently opposed to the ideology of communism. During his years in Parliament and throughout his private life Norman Baxter championed the virtues of hard work at all levels. He himself lived by that creed.

I would like to read a couple of notices from the family that appeared in *The West Australian* recently. The first states -

Dearly loved father of Allan. Father-in-law of Faye. Grandad of Shane, Vaughan (dec), Troy and Jason. We will never forget your words of wisdom and stories of old times you shared on your journey of 94 years.

Rest in peace father

The next notice states -

Farewell to Dad.

From Ray, daughter-in-law Noreen, grandsons John and Andrew and their families.

At rest after 94 years

The members of the National Party also pass on to the family their condolences, in recognition of the enormous effort the Baxters put into to this Parliament and to country people.

HON TOM STEPHENS (Mining and Pastoral - Minister for Local Government and Regional Development) [10.19 am]: I associate myself with the remarks of the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and Hon Murray Criddle from the National Party. The last session of Hon Norman Baxter's parliamentary career coincided with the beginning of my parliamentary career, to which the Leader of the Opposition has just referred, and it was during those first months of my parliamentary career that I had the opportunity of getting to know Norm Baxter. I specifically got to know him because of my maiden speech, which was an urgency motion. It was considered by many in the Chamber, and in particular Hon Norm Baxter, to be a breach of the standing orders that such an urgency motion should be utilised for an attack on the Government. This was in August 1982 during a difficult period in the life of the O'Connor coalition Government, but Norm Baxter took the opportunity of waiting until the end of my speech before making it absolutely clear that the parliamentary forms and practices, of which he had been a lifelong supporter, had been abused. I had been urged on by my then colleague the member for North Province, Peter Dowding, the subsequent Premier, to adopt the form of an urgency motion as my maiden speech. I never realised exactly the full consequences that were about to be unleashed in the Chamber. The Chamber got pretty rough that day. The only two members present at that time who are still here are the Leader of the Opposition and me. I probably remember it better than the Leader of the Opposition because it was my first foray into the Chamber.

Hon Norman Moore: And I responded to you.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The plan was that my speech would be followed by remarks by Hon Peter Dowding. So turbulent did the Chamber get that Hon Peter Dowding thought the best he could do was say nothing and bring the debate to a conclusion very quickly. That was unusual for Hon Peter Dowding. He was not a person who would turn away from a fight. He had decided to withdraw from the debate because things had become pretty difficult. At the conclusion of that debate, Norm Baxter rose and made comments about that process being a breach of the standing orders, to which a point of order was taken by, I think, Hon Peter Dowding, who said that that was a reflection on the Chair. President Griffiths urged him to withdraw. If it was not the President at that stage, it was the Deputy President; but certainly the Presiding Officer had accepted my remarks.

Norm Baxter was the oldest member of the Parliament at that time. I think he was aged about 73. He had had a long and distinguished career, and that is evident especially throughout regional Western Australia. His name is on a large number of plaques commemorating the opening of a variety of facilities. I have noticed his name on local government plaques in various parts of the wheatbelt especially, as well as in my part of regional Western Australia in the top end. His name is on the plaques on many health institutions, as is, of course, the name of his father on many plaques. His involvement in the rollout of infrastructure around regional Western Australia is something I have noticed over the years.

When I arrived in this place I was the youngest member of the Parliament. It was argued at that time that I was the youngest ever elected to the place, although that was in dispute with some codger who had been around in 1892, but no-one was sure about his birth, ancestry or anything else, so I may have been the youngest member elected at that time. Norm Baxter was determined that I learn a lesson for the opening remarks I made to the Chamber. Immediately after he had been suspended from the services of the Chamber - I think it was for only a day, but it might have been a week - he was extremely welcoming and friendly towards me in ways that surprised me. I reciprocated that friendship and learnt in particular of the work he did specifically through his parliamentary committee work. His work on the racing and gaming select committee was, at that time, the most

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Hon Kim Chance; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Murray Criddle; Mr Tom Stephens; President

significant work that had been done in the Parliament on the themes of racing and gaming. He had become the full bottle on that topic, along with one of my Labor colleagues Hon Fred McKenzie, who was also a participant in the work of that committee.

Norm Baxter was respected because not only had he been here for a very long time - in that time he had done more than simply occupy a seat - but also he had vigorously represented his area and served as a minister, and certainly was a stickler on proper interpretations of the standing orders. I was subsequently suspended from the Parliament, after having been charged and found guilty of a contempt of the Legislative Council. When the motion to suspend me was moved in this Chamber, I had a bit of an insight into how he might have felt at the time of his own suspension. However, these things happen in parliamentary life. I think Norm Baxter enjoyed the opportunity to make his point forcefully to the then Liberal Party President from a seat that was not assigned to a Liberal Party member. He will go down in the annals of this place as someone who deserves respect for having served this place and his electorate well. His family deserves not only this mark of respect from the Parliament but also the expression of sympathy from all of us. For those reasons I wanted to associate myself with the remarks that have been made today.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon John Cowdell): I join with the comments of honourable members. In his Address-in-Reply speech in August 1950 Hon Norman Baxter noted -

I was greatly moved by the kindly and eulogistic references to my late father by His Excellency the Governor in his opening Speech and, on the following Tuesday, by yourself, Mr President, and members of the House.

How appropriate that we should now be noting, with kindly and eulogistic references, the passing of Hon Norman Baxter himself. His passing will in due course be referred to in the Governor's speech. I note the 31 years of service of the honourable member to this Chamber and in particular his contribution as our Chairman of Committees and Deputy President for 11 years. He also served with distinction as a minister of the Crown for three years. His service to his party and his electorate was distinguished. Hon Norman Baxter was a person of substance, as the Leader of the Opposition noted. I will make sure that the comments of members of the House are conveyed to the family of Hon Norman Baxter. I ask members to carry this motion of appreciation and condolence by standing in their places.

Question passed, members standing.