



Speech By  
**Andrew Powell**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 September 2015

**MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: NEWTON, MR LE**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (9.43 am): Mr Lyell Edward 'Bill' Newton and his twin sister, Myra, were born in Brisbane to Upper Caboolture dairy farmers, Ted and Lily Newton, on 29 July 1935. Bill spent his entire life in the Upper Caboolture area. He attended Morayfield State School and after leaving school worked on the family farm. At 18 he was called up for national service but then returned home to start banana farming.

Bill joined the Junior Farmers Association, later to be known as Rural Youth, and became very involved. When he reached the membership age limit it did not faze him too much. He became an adviser and he maintained an interest in youth organisations throughout his life. It was through this organisation that Bill developed his passion for and involvement in agricultural shows. He eventually became an accredited produce judge.

Fortunately, Bill also met his future wife, Margaret, through the Junior Farmers Association. They were married in 1961 and had a family of four children. Last night, I spoke to Margaret. Unfortunately, she and the family cannot be here this morning, but I have reassured her that I will be delivering a copy of this motion to her and the family in the very near future.

Bill was also involved in the Caboolture Apex club and was chairman for a number of years. During that period that club built the Apex kindergarten at Caboolture. Again, when he reached the age limit for that club, he did not really let that faze him and he took on life membership of the Caboolture Apex club.

When Bill's children attended the Morayfield State School he was elected as secretary of the P&C. In 1983, when he was elected as the member for Caboolture, and despite his youngest child having already left the school many years earlier, Bill was still serving on the P&C.

Bill was an active member of the Country Party, the forerunner of the National Party, serving as branch and electorate council chairman. In 1983, Bill was preselected as the National Party candidate for Caboolture. At that time, the electorate ran from Deception Bay to Woodford and north to Golden Beach and included all of Bribie Island. I understand that Bill was assisted in his preselection by long-term Peachester dairy farmers Bruce and Helen Page. I owe a vote of thanks to Bruce and Helen for their contribution to this reflection on Bill's life.

Bill's involvement in the community and his strong network of friends meant that, for the opening of his campaign, he was able to hire the entire Caboolture Showgrounds. He catered for 1,000 people by putting on a barbecue. He literally slaughtered the fatted cow and whacked it on the spit. It was all done through the great support of his many volunteers within the party. The Premier of the day, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, came along and stood on the back a trailer hitched to a tractor in the showgrounds and opened his campaign. As we all know, Bill went on to win the seat for the National Party. As has been said, after the redistribution in 1986 Bill was the first member for the new seat of Glass House,

which in those days ran from the Caboolture River, took in Bribie Island, and went as far north as Imbil and Kenilworth.

As a member of parliament Bill would go to any length to assist anyone and everyone. He worked 24/7 to ensure that the government approved the necessary infrastructure for his growing community and he helped those who needed a hand. After driving around in his van, always packed with various boxes of fruit and mementos of the previous day's activities, Bill would arrive at a function or at the office with a smile on his face and an extended hand wanting to know how he could help. He loved attending the school presentation evenings and presenting the champion boy and girl with the Bill Newton Medal and, of course, a fruit tray.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, after Bill was elected, Parliament House was never the same. Ministers, backbenchers—all—were showered with fresh fruit. Those who worked in parliament would not miss out either with many of them receiving boxes of pawpaws or other fruit that was in season as the parliamentary sittings began. Bill would always stop and chat to everyone. If there was something that needed doing in his electorate, he always took the opportunity to knock on ministers' doors and he would not take no for an answer. I am sure that many times he simply kept coming back until he had the answer he wanted.

During Bill's second term Bribie Island became a particular focus. He was approached by a family who for five generations had been a leaseholder in the area that is now the Poverty Creek camping area. The negotiations for the creation of a national park to protect some of Bribie Island's important ecological area were underway. Whilst not against the declaration of a national park, Bill felt passionately that those who had lived on the land and grazed their cattle continuously since 1868 should not just be thrown off the land. Bill fought for the rights of this family, as he felt that he needed to make the department aware that a family living in an area for so many years had a connection to that land.

For those in the community who were suffering owing to a lack of public accommodation or those who had problems in dealing with local laws, Bill was always there to assist. If anyone had a problem, Bill would do his best to help them. Back in the 1980s, Deception Bay was more isolated from both Redcliffe and Caboolture. Bill fought hard to ensure that the people of Deception Bay had an ambulance station and a police station. He worked hard to ensure that the electrification of the rail was extended to Caboolture, as he knew that that was needed to ensure that Caboolture had other transport options for the rapidly expanding suburbs in that area.

Bill was intrinsic in developing agricultural studies at both Caboolture and Maleny state high schools—studies that successfully continue through to today. He had a hand in establishing the Woodford Folk Festival and he worked with the permaculture village that we now know as Crystal Waters, and the Greens party have been thanking him ever since. The provision of the Caboolture Hospital was another piece of vital infrastructure that Bill fought for. Even after losing the election in 1989, he did not give up and kept fighting for the local residents.

As you can imagine for someone like Bill, sticking to a schedule was never high on his agenda. When the Pope came to Brisbane and the open air mass was held at QEII, Bill decided to attend. All state MPs were invited and, although not a Catholic, Bill thought he should go down to Brisbane for the mass. Many of the streets had been closed for the arrival of the Pope's motorcade. In true Bill fashion, Bill was running late but that did not deter him. As he approached each barrier he would introduce himself and the police would wave him through. Security in those days was not quite the same as we have today. The crowds had been gathering and as the little grey van would approach excitement built as the crowd thought it was the Pope approaching. The crowd started to wave and stand up, wanting to catch a glimpse of the Holy Father. Instead, there was a smiling Billy Newton slowing down and waving to all the crowds as he drove past.

His electorate secretary Sue Quinn, to whom I owe a vote of thanks for her significant contribution to these reflections, always dreaded Mondays. Bill would arrive at work with a fistful of drink coasters, menus, programs or whatever he could find to write down a name and a number of someone who had approached him needing help. She would then have to ring these people to ensure they had their address so she could follow them up and tell them what Bill had been able to do for them or for their brother, their sister or whomever the relative might be. As I said, Bill never said no to anyone.

At the end of his political career he returned to farming and concentrated on growing tropical fruits and developing his South Devon cattle stud. Bill's involvement in the community continued. He became president of the Caboolture Growers and Marketing Group and played a leading role in the Caboolture National Serviceman's Association of which he was made a life member. He was also president of the Caboolture Area Schools Industry Links Scheme, encouraging trade skills for local

secondary students. In later years Bill could be found selling his tropical fruit at the cattle sales at Woodford and Toogoolawah and enjoying a yarn with the sale patrons.

He passed away on 2 August 2015, just days after his 80th birthday. His funeral at Upper Caboolture was attended by over 500 people. He will be remembered as a great community worker, a strong family man and everyone's mate—a top bloke who never lost the local touch.