

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 24 May, 1988

Mr Speaker (The Hon. Kevin Richard Rozzoli) took the chair at 2.15 p.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF VAUCLUSE

Death of Raymond William Aston

Mr Speaker reported the death on 23rd May, 1988, of the Hon. Raymond William Aston, lately serving in this House as member for the electoral district of Vacluse.

Vacant Seat

Motion by **Mr Greiner** agreed to:

That the seat of the Hon. Raymond William Aston, B.D.S., D.Orth., R.C.S., member for the electoral district of Vacluse, has become, and is now, vacant by reason of the death of the said the Hon. Raymond William Aston, B.D.S., D.Orth., R.C.S.

THE MINISTRY

Mr GREINER: I desire to inform the House that on 23rd May, 1988, His Excellency the Governor appointed the Hon. John Joseph Fahey, Dip.Law, M.P., as Minister for Industrial Relations and Employment, Minister for Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier.

DEATH OF THE HONOURABLE RAYMOND WILLIAM ASTON, B.D.S., D. Orth., R.C.S., MINISTER FOR CORRECTIVE SERVICES

Mr GREINER (Ku-ring-gai), Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Ethnic Affairs [2.17]: I move:

- (1) That this House desires to place on record the sense of loss this State has sustained by the death of the Honourable Raymond William Aston, B.D.S., D.Orth., R.C.S., a Minister of the Crown and member for Vacluse.
- (2) That Mr Speaker convey to the family the deep sympathy of members of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained.
- (3) That, as a mark of respect, this House do now adjourn until tomorrow at 2.15 p.m.

Today we mourn the untimely death of Ray Aston, Minister for Corrective Services. In moving this motion I want to place on record my personal tribute to Ray Aston as a man of the people; a man dedicated to serving not only his electorate of Vacluse, but also the people of New South Wales. When there were easier options, Ray Aston, as was typical of the man, chose to serve. He did not shirk when I offered him the difficult role of corrective services. He did not ask for an easier job. He accepted it with the zest and enthusiasm that were characteristic of everything he undertook in life. In his short term as Minister

for Corrective Services he stamped his own style on the role. His first job on being appointed was to visit numerous gaols and talk to the officers. Within days of his appointment he attended a prison officers' meeting at Long Bay and instead of making a speech, he asked prison officers to tell him what they thought was right and wrong with the system.

In two short months, Ray Aston earned the respect of the men and women with whom he worked. That is a legacy that will not be forgotten. Ray was educated at Waverley College and the University of Sydney, after which he pursued a speciality in orthodontics. By 1975 he had become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in orthodontics. He often talked of his time studying in London. It was a special part of his life and he learned much, not just in his profession, but also about life and laughter. Much of his philosophy of life came from those halcyon student days, and all of it was about caring and sharing for and with other people.

Ray was, of course, born into politics. His father, Sir William Aston, was a member of the federal Parliament between 1955 and 1972 and was a distinguished Speaker of the House of Representatives during the Gorton and McMahon administrations. To those who were his friends, Ray often confided the deep respect and admiration he had for his father, both as a politician and as a man. Ray's style, though, was more gentle, tempered perhaps by the influence of his mother, a lady who had given to this country two of the people whom she loved most. That is a debt that cannot be repaid.

Ray made his entry into politics more than a decade ago when he returned from London and joined the Liberal Party. He worked behind the scenes, and I started to understand his real potential when he was vice-president of the New South Wales Liberal Party and an influential member of the then strategy committee. At this stage I should pay tribute to the work done by Ray behind the scenes during the recent State election campaign. Though media mythology will ultimately credit many people for this Government's victory, Ray Aston was a key player who sought no beret for the tireless work that he did. That perhaps was a mark of the man.

It is fitting today that I should announce the implementation of the first of many changes that Ray had planned for his corrective services department. This, of course, is not a time for politics, but might I just say that earlier today Cabinet approved a recommendation from the late Minister that will radically change the administration of the department. It was a plan that Ray had carefully considered and had worked hard to ensure that he got it right.

Ray Aston will be remembered by many in all walks of life, not only for the work he did as a politician but for his real involvement in many charities and sporting organizations. He always had time for other people, no matter how busy the schedule. His involvement in the Royal Motor Yacht Club as a former commodore will soon be recognized when that club completes a major rebuilding program, much of which is owed to the work Ray put into the club and its administration.

Mr Speaker, may I on behalf of all members express my heartfelt sympathy to Ray's fiancée, Kathy Mayson; to Sir William and Lady Aston and their family; to Kathy's family, who had taken Ray as one of their own; and to Patty. His loss is a loss to the people of New South Wales. It is too, a personal moment for me. Ray Aston was not only a colleague but a friend.

Mr CARR (Maroubra), Leader of the Opposition [2.23]: On behalf of the Opposition I join the Premier in this motion of condolence to the family and friends of the late Dr Ray Aston. In the politics of Sydney's eastern suburbs, few families have served with greater distinction. Ray Aston belonged to an intensely political family which took as its public duty service to the Liberal cause. His father, Sir William Aston, represented the federal electorate of Phillip from 1955 to 1961 when he was defeated by one of the former Labor members of this House, Sydney Einfeld. At the 1963 elections, Sir William again won Phillip for the Liberal Party and held it at each election until 1972, serving his last two terms as the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

So, politics and public office were in Ray Aston's blood. Accordingly, he contested Liberal Party preselection for the federal electorate of Wentworth in 1981 and 1984. On both occasions he was narrowly defeated by the former leader of the New South Wales Liberal Party and member for Fuller, Peter Coleman. In April 1986 Dr Aston was chosen as the Liberal Party candidate for the Vaucluse by-election caused by the retirement of his party's deputy leader, Mrs Rosemary Foot. Having served as the vice-president of the New South Wales Liberal Party from 1983, he was the clear choice to serve that electorate, long the heartland of conservative urban politics in, first, the colony, and later the State of New South Wales. On 31st May, 1986, Ray Aston was elected as the member for Vaucluse and retained his seat at the general election on 19th March this year.

In his maiden speech Ray Aston spoke of the beauty and diversity of his electorate, rich as it is in associations with the origins of representative Government and with the historic figure of W. C. Wentworth. Aged 44 years, Ray Aston was entering his most productive years of public office and public service in New South Wales, and he would have enjoyed those years. Ray Aston served as a Minister for just a single sitting of Parliament but he made his mark that day with foreshadowed changes to the day release of prisoners scheme. He gave every appearance of fulfilling the essential role for a Minister administering this State's prisons. He was a conciliator by nature, not drawn to hyperbole or combativeness.

Even from my side of Parliament Dr Aston's reputation as a party organizer was recognized. Someone told me he was in charge of polling booth organization for his party at the last State election. I gather that he had a formidable reputation as a party fund raiser. In other words, he was one of that small band of people who willingly shoulder the organizational tasks of his or her political party. These are the essential jobs of politics, without which a democracy does not function.

Ray Aston was a political professional. He could have enjoyed a more comfortable life in medicine but, through family tradition and his own commitment, became engaged in the politics of his party and the public life of New South Wales. On this side of the House we found him cheerful and pleasant. I speak for many of my colleagues when I say he was someone we looked forward to getting to know better. On behalf of my colleagues, I extend deep and sincere sympathy to the Aston family on their loss.

Mr W. T. J. MURRAY (Barwon), Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development and Minister for Public Works [2.27]: I join with the Premier and Leader of the Opposition in expressing our sincere sympathy upon the sad loss of Ray Aston. It is a sad loss to this Parliament, this State and this nation that one so talented and with such potential as Ray Aston should be taken from us. During his brief political career Ray demonstrated he had qualities that surely

would have taken him to the pinnacle of politics in this State. He had much to offer the people of New South Wales, and his loss will be sorely felt.

Ray was a clear thinker and a good organizer. He got things done. He was a good friend to members of the National Party. Because Ray firmly believed in the coalition, he frequently socialized with his friends from the country, and went out of his way to cultivate teamwork and the camaraderie of his colleagues. We often joked that we would have to make him an honorary member of the National Party. Ray was a magnificent host and a great friend, and one whose company we all enjoyed. He had a tremendous conviction and belief in what he did and, more especially, in the politics of the party that he represented.

Despite two severe political rebuffs, Ray did not take his bat home. He got in, did more work for the Liberal Party, and eventually was rewarded with pre-selection for the seat of Vacluse, election to Parliament, and then appointment as a Minister of the Crown. The fact that as the vice-president of his party he was so heavily involved in its organizational structure was to him the very basis of his political thinking and lifestyle. Quite often, at night, in discussion with his colleagues, he opened up his office to get people together. The main aim of Ray Aston, and also at that stage the Opposition, was to bind together the coalition parties. In that way he sought to achieve what he had worked for for so long. The strength of that bond was never more evident than when the New South Wales coalition easily withstood an attempt by external forces to place a wedge between the coalition parties.

Ray had that unique gift of communication that made people feel comfortable in his presence. He was a good communicator. Ray was destined to be a leader of men, and so his untimely passing leaves an uncompleted chapter in the history of politics in New South Wales. Ray had the comfort of enjoying, in his blue ribbon seat of Vacluse, one of the largest electoral majorities in the State. He worked tirelessly to maintain that majority. It was typical of his unselfishness that Ray spent much of his time and money campaigning for his colleagues in less secure seats. As Minister for Corrective Services, Ray displayed the same dedication to his work that he had shown in opposition. Obviously his dedication impressed the Premier when he came to choose his ministry. On behalf of my colleagues in the Government, but more particularly my colleagues in the National Party, I extend my heartfelt sympathies to Ray's parents, Sir William and Lady Aston, to the other members of the family, to his fiancée, Kathy Mayson, to Lisa and Michael, and to Patty.

Mr COLLINS (Middle Harbour), Minister for Health and Minister for Arts [2.30]: I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Premier in paying my respects to the late Ray Aston. I have shared a number of experiences with Ray Aston. Ray and I attended the same school, Waverley College, the same university, the University of Sydney, and we served together on the State Executive of the Liberal Party when I was able to observe at firsthand his many fine qualities. A few months ago Ray and I returned to Waverley College in the lead-up to the State election campaign. It was an opportunity for us to reflect on the task ahead of us and the work that had to be done. It was with a great sense of accomplishment that Ray and I went to Government House in the week that we were to be sworn in by His Excellency as members of the Executive Council. In many ways I thought it particularly appropriate for us to attend Government House together that day, because the portfolios we held were, and still remain, among the most contentious in the entire political spectrum of this State. I know that Ray dedicated himself to coming to grips with the corrective services portfolio. He had tremendous vision

and energy, and had given everything he could to that portfolio in the brief time that was to be available to him.

As has already been said by the Premier, Ray was commodore of the Royal Motor Yacht Club. It was through that club that he became a close friend of my family, in particular my uncle and aunt, Jack and Phyll Doyle. On behalf of my family, especially my aunt, my uncle, and my wife, Dominique, I extend sincere condolences to Sir William and Lady Aston, to Kathy, and to other members of the Aston family.

Mr CLEARY (Coogee) [2.32]: This is a very sad occasion because today we are paying our respects not to a former member of Parliament but to a current member of Parliament. It brings home to us how vulnerable we all are when a man of the early age of 44 is taken with a severe heart attack. Also, it brings home to us the pressure that is placed on a Minister of the Crown. I speak with a great deal of experience, for in only the first six months of my ministry I also suffered a heart attack because of the pressures and complexities of my ministry. I was lucky; I was saved from death. Unfortunately, Ray could not withstand that pressure and his heart gave out. I can understand also the pressure that is placed on the new Ministers. Departmental heads present Ministers with voluminous portfolios and say, "Minister, this is what we have done; this is what it is all about". The Minister sits there and wonders, "How the devil am I ever going to get on top of this".

Let me give Ministers a word of advice. They should not worry about reading the portfolios presented to them. The best way to learn what is happening is to get their departmental heads to tell them about material in the portfolios. I tried to learn by reading the contents of portfolios, but that was impossible. One can only fully understand the contents by being told what they contain. There will be no reward for the effort of taking portfolios home to read.

It must be remembered that the people one passes on the way up the political ladder are the same one meets on the way down. Prior to the State general election I made that statement in a point of order on a matter being debated in this Chamber. We are all human beings—even though we may have different political philosophies—and must live together, work together, and make this State a better place. Although Ray was a good and capable fellow, the sort of pressure to which he was subjected is borne by all Ministers and even political backbenchers. That pressure was highlighted on an earlier occasion when I addressed this Parliament on the news of the death of Jack Renshaw. I said then that during the period of my association with this place I had found changes in atmosphere and in attitude.

It is hoped, Mr Speaker, that although you may change the attitude of this place, you do not do so to the extent that jovial interjections are not tolerated. We need some relief from pressure in this Chamber. Unless we have that relief we shall not reach ripe old ages. If we become too serious and the pressure becomes too severe for us to sustain, we are likely to fall. That matter should be borne in mind when the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal meets. Money cannot relieve the pressure placed upon us, but it can make our lives a little more bearable.

Like the Minister for Health, I attended the same school as Ray did. I know his father Bill and his mother Betty, but I do not know Kathy. My sporting and school careers were contemporary with Ray's. When we were school cadets we would line up in Salisbury Street in front of his parents' house on Fridays and march to Queens Park to perform our duty. On other occasions, when I was looking for someone with whom to play handball in the park after

school, I could always find a good competitor in Ray Aston. We had many good times together.

I remind his father Bill how close he and my father were. My father was not a political animal but had much to do with the development of political life in the eastern suburbs through his connection with the Bondi Junction Chamber of Commerce and the Randwick Rotary Club. My father also promoted political life through his association with me and the father of Peter Anderson, a former Minister on our side of the Chamber, whose mother Kath was also a politician.

Bill Aston, the father of Ray, had a similar effect on members of the other political colour. I have shared afternoon tea at the home of Betty and Bill Aston, and on occasions I have attended the Mary Immaculate Church with the Aston family. When Ray became a member of this House I acknowledged then our mutual friendship at school and hoped that it would continue during our parliamentary careers. A number of my colleagues on this side of the House will remember only too well the occasions when I told them not to take Ray Aston cheaply for he would become an astute politician, having had much to do with the administration of the Liberal Party in the eastern suburbs.

A story comes to my mind. In 1974, when I was first associated with private enterprise and the R. W. Miller group of companies, I had much political business with Pat Hills, at that time the Leader of the Opposition, and also with a former Premier, Sir Robert Askin. When I became a member of this House, Sir Robert took me aside and introduced me to all his Ministers. To this day I can remember his words. He said, "He is in the wrong party, but he is not a bad bloke". I said to Sir Robert, "What is past, is past. The future is what I am worried about. And this is the way my political career will begin". I repeated those words when Ray became a member of this House.

After leaving school I did not see Ray Aston for a number of years. During that time he went to London and obtained his doctorate in orthodontics. Ray Aston made a substantial contribution to the community. He was paid a pittance for his services to this Parliament compared with his salary as an orthodontist. But he believed he could contribute to the community as a member of Parliament, and was willing to do so.

In 1974 when I became a member of this House a parliamentarian's salary was \$14,000 a year. Nowadays my children would eat the equivalent of that amount in groceries every time we visit the shops. I do not mean my remarks to be jovial, but if we are to encourage the right people to represent the citizens of New South Wales and Australia, something must be done to have them paid a salary commensurate with that responsibility. Ray took up that challenge. He devoted himself to his responsibilities, not only as the member for Vacluse, but also, in the later stages of his time as a member of this House, in his capacity as Minister for Corrective Services. I am saddened that the pressures of parliamentary life have brought about the loss of such a young fellow. He leaves his father Bill, his mother Betty, and of course Kathy, his fiancée, and other family members. Each of them will remember Ray for the fun times with him and the work that he undertook.

As a mere human being speaking to this condolence motion one is brought back to the realities of life and how severe at times life can be. On a positive note, even at such a young age Ray Aston left his mark on society. At least he could truthfully say, "I contributed", which in itself is important, regardless of the mercenary aspects of parliamentary life I mentioned earlier. I am sure one would be satisfied if, when one's time comes it could be said of

him: he contributed. He did a good job while he was here. He left sorrows behind, but he produced and provided. I am deeply saddened that Ray Aston has left us. As I have said, it should not be forgotten that those one passes on the way up are the same people one meets on the way down. I hope that Ray will be long remembered as a good person, as his father is. One was able to speak with Ray in a non-political way at the bar, to partake of a drink and enjoy a conversation without nastiness, as one would expect from a mate and a good fellow. We will all miss you, Ray.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan), Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs [2.44]: I join with the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and other Ministers and members of this House in paying tribute to Dr Ray Aston. I extend my sympathy to his family and to Kathy Mayson. His death is a sad loss. Ray Aston was a young man. In today's terminology, with a person's life expectancy well beyond three-score years and 10, Ray Aston attained about half the longevity that one would expect to attain. One of the fondest attributes of Ray Aston I shall cherish was his enormous loyalty to himself, his party, his brand of politics, and his friends. Undoubtedly, Ray Aston was an achiever.

Other honourable members have referred to his academic achievements. It is no mean feat to achieve a doctorate and to be accepted by one's peers, especially in England, the home of medicine in the western world. Nor is it any mean effort to be elected as a member of this Parliament. As we are often reminded by the honourable member for Castlereagh, it is a rare honour to be a member of Parliament. In the history of New South Wales politics only about 4 000 people have had the honour of becoming a member of this Parliament. Ray Aston achieved that distinction, in itself an honour. It speaks volumes of Ray, and shows what a great fighter he was. As the Premier and the Deputy Premier said, Ray Aston achieved his goal of becoming a member of Parliament after having overcome a number of setbacks. Tenacity is a quality I admire in people; and Ray Aston had tenacity.

I should like to inform honourable members of a coincidence. Without any prior discussion about what we each wished to say when speaking to this motion, the Deputy Premier and I made similar notes. A short while ago before I left my office to come to the Chamber I wrote some notes on a scrap of paper. One of those notes reads, "One of the many reasons we are in government is loyalty, and coalition unity". My next note reads, "He was an unashamed coalitionist, and social contact was so important". Honourable members will be aware that those very points were raised by the Deputy Premier. Ray Aston had a knack of communicating. Often he was responsible for holding the coalition together. He was a quiet man. On a number of occasions when I consulted him, on a free basis, about my children's teeth, I received a few quiet words of advice. He did that in the corridors, in his office or wherever he happened to be. He had that knack of making people relax and keeping people together. I have no doubt that Ray Aston is deserving of much of the credit for the coalition parties' achieving office in Government.

A dear friend of mine, whom I regard as one of the great bush philosophers, has had many successes in his life. He has been a millionaire; he has been penniless; he was a shearer, a publican and a property-owner. He is one of life's great characters, who has a good knowledge of the arts, despite the fact that one might call him a rough character. He frequently says, "All I want on my headstone are the words 'He tried'." That phrase is apt for Ray Aston.

Mr FAHEY (Southern Highlands), Minister for Industrial Relations and Employment, Minister for Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier [2.47] I join with my colleagues from both sides of the House to speak to this condolence motion. Undoubtedly in the four years I have been a member of Parliament, this is the saddest moment I have experienced. I pay tribute to a friend and colleague who enriched my life in the time I have known him.

Just as I am sure did most members of this Chamber, yesterday I awoke to hear on the radio that we had lost a friend. A short time thereafter I spoke with Ray Aston's closest friend, Ron Fryer, who lives in my electorate. Ron informed me that last week on Friday evening he had a drink with Ray and discussed an incident that occurred earlier in the week. They laughed and joked about the fact that Ray had experienced pain down his left side and in his left arm. He said that Ray put it down to his having a dentist's elbow. Ray Aston asked Ron Fryer whether Ron would be best man at his wedding to Kathy, which was to take place on 23rd July. Ray Aston had everything to look forward to. At times it is difficult to understand the way in which divine providence intervenes in people's lives. Ray Aston was a confident, capable man. He had the ability to make people trust him. He gave the impression of being on top of everything.

In our conversation yesterday morning Ron Fryer told me that on the one and only day that Ray was able to come to this Chamber as a Minister of the Crown, he sat over in the corner; he felt his heart expanding, pounding against his rib cage in the excitement and exhilaration of question time. It was the first occasion that Ray had appeared as a Minister at question time. I think that is what the honourable member for Coogee was saying: that sometimes these cold walls bring out all sorts of hurt. People have feelings. We all say things here that we would probably never say outside this theatre if relationships were on a one-for-one basis.

I hope that what Ray felt that day and the emotions we feel today will bring all honourable members a little closer together. No matter what words we use, or what we say about issues, please let us leave personalities out of debate. No words that any of us can say today will console Kathy and Sir William and Lady Aston, who are with us in the Chamber. Their heavy feeling of loss will not be relieved in any way by our words. But let me say to Kathy particularly that she gave Ray a lease of life that was extremely important to him. It was important to those of us who were his friends to see what she meant to him and what he looked forward to. We are all hurting; I suppose time will heal some of that hurt.

Ray Aston loved life. He lived it to its fullest and he did it capably. All who have supported the motion this afternoon have recognized his achievements. He loved people for what they were, not for what they could do for him. People loved him and will continue to love and remember him for the enrichment his life gave to others. He has left behind a legacy of being able to achieve things quietly but sensibly. This Parliament and this State will miss him. His friends, Bryce and Ken, will miss him from the Parliament; his staff, whom I met yesterday afternoon, had already learnt to appreciate and to love him. An obvious loyalty had built up in a very short time. Ray's death is a tragedy and nothing we say will ever overcome that. We can only hope and pray that, as a result of being part of Ray Aston's life, we might all be better people.

Mr LANGTON (Kogarah) [2.53]: Though Ray Aston had been a member of this Parliament for only a short time, he had certainly made his mark, not only in the legislative sense. As a member of an Opposition party, I

had an opportunity to share his hospitality, which was one of his great attributes. His appointment to the Ministry was due recognition of his ability. In his difficult portfolio he had already gained the support and the confidence of a number of the diverse groups in the area of corrective services. He treated me, as shadow spokesman for corrective services, fairly and honestly. I have no doubt that in time he would have made his mark in the field of corrective services. I offer sincere sympathy to Kathy Mayson and to Ray's family and friends.

Mr PARK (Tamworth) [2.54]: I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party, and other speakers in paying tribute to the late Hon. Raymond William Aston. In his maiden speech on 30th September, 1986, Ray showed his dedication and enthusiasm. In that speech he said that he looked forward to his future parliamentary career with a sense of keenness and anticipation. He said it was an honour and a privilege to be elected a member of this Parliament and that he was aware of his enormous responsibilities, not only to his constituents in the electorate of Vacluse but to the people who lived and worked across New South Wales. He said he was deeply conscious of the trust placed in him, and spoke about challenges to manage public utilities effectively and render public services more cost efficient.

As one of two health professionals in this House, Ray Aston spoke in his maiden speech mostly about health. It was perhaps a measure of his capacity that he did not devote his speeches in Parliament to any particular portfolio. I venture to say that he could have undertaken successfully any one of a number of ministries. I understand he had prepared two major Cabinet recommendations which were to be discussed today. At his direction, mass urinalysis to detect drug taking was commenced in the prison system. He initiated meaningful discussions with the prison officers' union. Ray Aston was particularly conscious of the role of prison officers and he wanted to improve their status. He regarded as perhaps his greatest achievement an arrangement made only last week with the Minister for Family and Community Services to redevelop Brush Farm at Eastwood as a corrective services college.

Ray Aston brought to his portfolio a personal interest and humanity, and an ability to grasp the significance of issues and to make considered and rational decisions. In the short time that he was a Minister, he won the respect of his departmental and personal staffs, and of prison officers and authorities. Ray Aston worked untiringly in the public interest and for the introduction of subjective reforming to the New South Wales prison system. I extend my sympathy to his father and mother, Sir William and Lady Aston, to his fiancée, Kathy Mayson, and to family members.

Mr E. T. PAGE (Waverley) [2.58]: I have known the Aston family for many, many years under various circumstances. Ray's father, Bill, was mayor of Waverley before I gained that position. During my involvement with the local council, I had a close association with Bill when he was a federal member for Phillip and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Ray's sister Margaret was a nurse at War Memorial Hospital when my youngest child was born. Over the past few years I came to know Ray because of our geographic closeness. He was obviously a man of high intelligence and high motivation, who deserved respect and received it. His passing is to be mourned by this House and by the people of New South Wales. I add my sentiments to those expressed by other honourable members and extend sympathy to Bill and Betty, and to Anne, Margaret and Kathy.

Mr BAIRD (Northcott), Minister for Transport [2.59]: I join with other speakers in this motion of condolence to Ray Aston's family, and in particular to his parents, Sir William and Lady Aston, and to his fiancée, Miss Kathy Mayson. Like all honourable members, I was stunned when I awoke yesterday and heard the news of Ray's death. He will be sorely missed by his friends inside and outside the Parliament. The State has lost a man who would have made a fine Minister in any administration. I came to know Ray well in 1986 during the Vacluse by-election when he introduced me to all the small-businessmen in Vacluse—and there are many of them. It was clear that Ray had their respect and they were happy to display his campaign material above their premises. Ray was well respected in the area; everyone knew him by his first name.

The more one got to know Ray Aston, the more one liked him. He was basically a reserved person, totally without pretension and very down-to-earth, bearing in mind his family background and professional achievements. His office was always open to members to come and have a chat. As a result, his office was usually filled with people who would sit and talk to him. He was just a friendly-natured guy.

I have a particular memory of the evening that the Queen visited Sydney. Ray and his fiancée Kathy, the Minister for Industrial Relations and his wife, and my wife and I went out for dinner. Ray was in a relaxed mood and spoke in an animated way about the problems and pressures mentioned by the honourable member for Coogee, of working until 11 o'clock and 12 o'clock of an evening, and on weekends, and dealing with bureaucrats. On that evening Sir Humphrey really came alive. Having had an enjoyable dinner, we then went to the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. People were lined around the decks of the *Britannia* preening themselves. Ray, noticing an open porthole, stuck his head through and begun a conversation with an assistant cook. During the discussion he discovered something important, which he shared with everyone on the deck: each day there were three types of gravy prepared on board because it was never known what type of meat would be served. That is the type of fellow Ray was: totally down-to-earth and lacking in pretension.

Ray was a man of considerable intellectual ability and judgment. He worked behind the scenes without being overly concerned with seeing his name in headlines. As the chairman of the Liberal Party's roads committee, Ray was of invaluable assistance to me when I was the Opposition spokesman on transport matters. He produced an excellent paper about New South Wales roads. Despite his having little background in that area, it was typical of his intellectual ability that he could so quickly grasp a complex issue like the State's road network. During the recent election campaign I particularly relied on Ray's advice about roads in various electorates. Ray's promotion to the Ministry was richly deserved. He would have brought the same standard of excellence to his portfolio that he brought to other areas of his life.

Ray's fiancée Kathy is a lovely person, and I really feel for her in her loss. Ray thought she was a wonderful person and it was obvious, as he got to know her and became engaged to her, just how much she meant to him. I express my deepest sympathy to Ray's parents, Sir William and Lady Aston. I shall be joined by all my colleagues in saying that Ray was a fine man. I shall miss him very much as a colleague and friend.

Mr PEACOCKE (Dubbo), Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs [3.3]: Many honourable members of this House knew the Hon. Ray Aston better than I did. I first met him when he became a member of this House in 1986.

But Ray was one of those people whom one instinctively likes: a nice, quiet, decent man with a sense of humour and ability, who had been willing, as the honourable member for Coogee rightly said, to give up a lucrative practice in orthodontics to enter Parliament, and made the sacrifice not only of money but also of the time that is necessary to do what one believes to be right for one's community as a member of the Parliament of New South Wales.

Ray was the typical nice sort of bloke that you would like to meet anywhere. I recall a recent occasion when my wife Nancy came to Sydney to attend a function—which she does not have the opportunity to do all that often—and met Ray and Kathy for the first time. Later she remarked to me what a tremendous couple they were and what a nice bloke Ray was. That is how he was.

Though Ray was a Minister for only a short time, he left a significant mark on that ministry. It is tragic that a man of his ability and pleasant and happy personality has been lost to this House. All of us feel with the greatest sincerity a depth of loss that is hard to express. I should like to pass on the condolences of myself, my wife Nancy and our family, to Sir William and Lady Aston, and particularly to Kathy. I think they will know the depth of our feelings for them at this sad time.

Mr J. D. BOOTH (Wakehurst) [3.5]: I welcome the chance to join with the Premier, Deputy Premier, Leader of the Opposition and other Ministers and members in this motion of condolence. Like the honourable member for Miranda and several other members on this side of the House, I came to know Ray Aston during our respective periods working in the organization of the Liberal Party prior to our election to Parliament. As the Leader of the Opposition said, Ray Aston was a person who devoted a great deal of time to the basic workings of politics, without which politics and parliaments do not function. Ray's willingness to do that sort of work over the years always impressed his colleagues at the conference level, the regional presidency level and finally at the State executive and vice-presidency level of the Liberal Party, and consequently many people supported him for the positions in which he sought to advance himself.

Ray was elected to this House in 1986 and, as has been said, in a short time achieved recognition of his considerable capacity and ability, and particularly his friendship. His hospitality was not quite legendary but certainly was such that everyone knew they were always welcome in his office. His office was destined to be a focal point for people to gather and talk. As the Deputy Premier and others have said, Ray was very much a coalitionist, in the sense that he wanted members to gather together.

One should particularly pay tribute to Ray's capacity as a person of pragmatic good sense above and beyond his obvious intellectual capacity. That sort of good sense had been displayed in this Parliament and in the wider world of government in New South Wales, in the extremely difficult Ministry of Corrective Services, in which it would be easy to develop considerable political infamy. It is true to say that Ray was worried about being appointed to administer that portfolio but, as other members have said, his reaction was not to complain or ask for some other ministry, but to get stuck right into the job and to bring to it the sort of good sense that typified his approach to politics. He did not allow himself to become wrapped up on high-minded ideology at the expense of good administration and achieving results. In that sense, as well as in the personal sense, all in this Parliament have suffered a loss through his thoroughly untimely death.

I join with others in expressing my condolences to his parents, Sir William and Lady Aston, to Kathy, to other members of his family, and to Patty. There are very few occasions in this Chamber when members from both sides of the House feel the same way about any matter. This afternoon is one of those rare occasions—and perhaps that is one of the greatest tributes we could pay to Ray Aston.

Mr CATERSON (The Hills) [3.9]: I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Premier, Ministers and members in paying a tribute to our colleague, the late Hon. Raymond William Aston, and in conveying to his parents and to Kathy our sincere condolences. As has been said, Ray Aston was a member of this Parliament for only two years. However, in the workings of the Liberal Party, many of us knew him for a longer period. That allowed us the opportunity of judging his great ability. He was truly a man of great ability, who easily made friends. The Deputy Premier and others have said that he had an open-door policy with his parliamentary office. From time to time many members on both sides of the House took the opportunity to visit and talk with him about people, politics, or the happenings of the day. That was always a pleasurable experience because, having a happy nature, Ray was able to put people at ease and convey to them that he was indeed their friend.

Dr Aston's ability was evident not only in his academic achievements, but also in the fact that the Premier of this State so readily appointed him to the ministry. His passing is a very great loss to this Parliament. It is very difficult to put into words the thoughts in our hearts on an occasion such as this. Ray Aston was a hard working and dedicated man. He would have made a great success of his very difficult ministerial portfolio. I join with others who have already spoken in conveying on behalf of my family and myself our sincere sympathy to his parents, Sir William and Lady Aston, to other members of the family, and to Kathy Mayson.

Dr METHERELL (Davidson), Minister for Education and Youth Affairs [3.11]: Kathy, our hearts go out to you. Ray's suffering is over but your loneliness, your pain and your anguish goes on. It is only a few weeks since we all sat down together at that Cabinet luncheon shortly after we were sworn in. Louise and I sat opposite Kathy and Ray. It was one of the very special moments of our lives, not because we were both sworn in as Ministers that day, but because both of us announced to our colleagues our engagements. I remember the wonderful sense of warmth and sharing at that luncheon, and of people gathering round congratulating us. Louise and I feel very personally the loss that you, Kathy, have suffered, and the very great loneliness that you must be feeling at this moment. If there can be any consolation, it is not only that Ray was such a wonderful person or that you had already shared so much together, but that Ray left this life at the pinnacle of his career.

Mr Cleary, a former Minister in the Labor Government, spoke about the pressures and the enormous physical stress which all of us suffer. He said how difficult it is to remove that stress from our lives at the end of the day. We are under that stress and pressure for almost 24 hours a day and impose it upon those we love. Only a week or two ago I was reading in the very early hours of the morning trying to let go some of that stress and relax before going to sleep. I often do that. I was reading about mountain climbing. Mountain climbing gives me a special feeling and sense of excitement and calm. I was reading of a pair of climbers and their struggle to get to the top of Mount Everest, the highest point in the world, and what happened to them immediately after their ascent—the most dangerous moment after one has climbed the summit. The book described how, having climbed to the summit, the climbers

then stepped off it into the mist and were never seen again. In one very special sense that is similar to what happened to Ray. He reached the summit, stepped off it, and will never be seen again. He has left us at a moment of very special achievement. But he has left us with wonderful memories. Kathy, you, and all members of the Aston family, take our love with you, and you take Ray's memory with you. Kathy, you are very special to us all.

Mr LONGLEY (Pittwater) [3.15]: I join with my parliamentary colleagues in this condolence motion. Ray Aston and I were elected on the same day, 31st May, 1986. We were sworn in on the same day, 23rd September, 1986, and indeed gave our maiden speeches on the same day, 30th September, 1986. During that time we shared many of the common experiences that new members of Parliament experience. We shared standing for Parliament at by-elections held at the same time; the newness of parliamentary life and its intense pressures; the novelty of dealing with the news media for the first time; dealing with parliamentary colleagues; and finding our way round—all those little things that make being a new member of Parliament a novel experience. One remembers those things all one's parliamentary career.

Ray and I developed a special friendship. We spent two years in opposition together. As other colleagues have mentioned, Ray's door was always open. I discovered shortly after we were elected that he and I had a common enjoyment of scotch. I think he acquired it in the same place I did, namely, Great Britain. I was fortunate to acquire that taste in the highlands of Scotland, which I suppose would be the best place to acquire such a taste. When walking through the highlands of Scotland we came across a little stream with the water bubbling down. We had been walking for a while, and as I was particularly thirsty, I took a cup of it. Lo and behold the water had that distinctive colour. I wonder if that is what improved its taste so much. Ray was the sort of person who would appreciate that.

He had a real sense of life, of mateship and friendship, a vivacity which I know his fiancée Kathy shared. On a number of occasions Kathy, I, and various other friends met in Ray's office and discussed many issues of the day. Ray was very keen to discuss things. We had many philosophical arguments and discussions on those issues. We also talked about the ordinary things of life. I join with the House in expressing sympathy and sorrow to Kathy and the Aston family. We have lost not only a competent and able colleague who had a capacity for hard work, but also a very good friend.

Mr WEBSTER (Goulburn) [3.19]: When Ray Aston was elected to this House a constituent and very good friend said to me that Ray Aston was a good bloke. This lady before her marriage had worked for Ray in Sydney when he was practising as a dentist. When Ray became a member of this House we all realized that he was a good bloke. Ray worked hard, was a good politician, and had a good understanding of politics. Also, he was a particularly good friend to all members of the National Party. Other members have touched on that friendship. Ray Aston was well liked. He was an easy man to like. Ray Aston had a love of life. He loved his boat and he loved his leisure. He loved also his work and he had a great dedication to his family, to this State and to this Parliament.

Two prisons lie within my electorate, Goulburn gaol and Oberon Training Centre. Shortly after Ray Aston was appointed Minister for Corrective Services, I had significant discussions with him about those establishments. Undoubtedly, he had quickly achieved a full grasp of his ministerial portfolio. He was most concerned about the welfare of prison officers, their salaries and

working conditions; and he was doing his utmost to resolve these problems at the time he became ill. I was grateful for his consultations with me. When I conveyed the result of the consultations to the people in my electorate who work in the prison service they appreciated what the Minister was trying to do for them. Ray Aston will be sorely missed. All people respected him. I respected him deeply. I should like his family and Kathy to know how much we shall all miss him, and on behalf of my wife Libby and myself, I extend to them our most sincere sympathy.

Mr CAUSLEY (Clarence), Minister for Natural Resources [3.21]: I join with the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and colleagues on both sides of the House in paying tribute to Ray Aston. When I came to this Parliament in 1984 I did not know of Ray Aston, although on a number of occasions I had heard of his father from other sources. I did not really get to know Ray until he was elected the parliamentary representative for Vacluse after the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party retired. Members of the National Party are famous for their camaraderie. It is well-known that they get together on occasions and discuss many issues. Ray Aston soon became part of those discussions.

I probably spent as much time with Ray as did anyone, often in the company of the press secretary of the Leader of the National Party, Bryce Osborne, and the press secretary of the then Leader of the Opposition, Ken Hooper. We shared many hours discussing politics and tactics to be adopted to remove the Government of the day. Perhaps Ray and I were kindred spirits. I was impressed by him, and until the time of his death we were close friends. I clearly remember how he spoke of his boat or cruiser with deep love. Soon after we became Ministers, I had the pleasure of being taken by Ray to the Royal Motor Yacht Club, on the harbour, where I was introduced to club members. I accepted that as a great honour, and was happy to meet his friends. On a number of occasions I dined with Ray and Kathy, and enjoyed their friendship. I know of the great admiration and love Ray had for Kathy. I am sure she knows that. It is one of the sad parts of life that he did not live to marry Kathy as they had planned.

A prison is situated in my electorate, and on a number of occasions Ray spoke to me about problems in the prison system. I am sure that Ray had a full grasp of problems in the prison system and that the changes he planned would have done much to help the prison officers and the prisoners, and to maintain law and order. On behalf of my family I add my condolences to those already conveyed by other members of this House to Sir William and Lady Aston, to Kathy, and to other members of the Aston family.

Mr PICKARD (Hornsby), Minister for Mineral Resources and Minister for Energy [3.23]: I wish to join the Premier, Deputy Premier, Leader of the Opposition, Ministers, and members of the House, in conveying to Sir William and Lady Aston, and to Kathy, the sympathy of my wife and myself at the loss of Ray. Three things about Ray stand out in my mind. First, he was a friend to whom the words of the poet can be ascribed: Those friends you have and their adoption tried, bind them to yourself with hoops of steel. I knew Ray for many years, as I knew his father also. The second thing I recall of Ray was his ability for making one feel at ease socially. I recall the Wednesday nights that we used to have the Gilbert and Sullivan society remnants gathered in his room. On one evening we sang the words of a song that describes how one gentleman led his regiment from behind but found it less exciting. Ray was one who never led from behind. He was always willing to step out and fight, and to do what had to be done.

The third thing about Ray that I recall occurred on the morning of the radio announcement of his death. My wife came in and broke the news. Immediately I thought of his tremendous ability for reconciling people, bringing them together. In that sense he was a true man of peace—not of easy peace but of real peace. Prior to breaking the news to me, my wife had pointed out something she was reading. She said, “They that sow peace will reap the harvest of righteousness”. To the Aston family, and to Kathy, on behalf of Sally Anne and myself, I convey deep sympathy at this time of their loss.

Mr SINGLETON (Coffs Harbour), Minister for Administrative Services and Assistant Minister for Transport [3.26]: I join with the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and all my colleagues who have spoken to this motion of sympathy in memory of the late Hon. Raymond William Aston. I knew him for only a short time. Ray, the honourable member for Coogee, and I, shared one common experience: we all had open heart surgery. Last week I was concerned about Ray’s illness. I tried to contact him but he was not at home. Later, he contacted me and said there was no problem, that it was only a virus. On Thursday last he said he was feeling great. Others who had seen him that morning agreed that he seemed to be over his problem. Now we know that he did not overcome his problem.

Several members who have spoken to this motion of sympathy have cautioned us all to remember our mortality. I can add nothing to that. I emphasize how Ray Aston acquitted himself so worthily as a citizen of this great State. It should be a great comfort to those he leaves mourning to know that he was a man who lived respected and died regretted. My wife Nancy joins with me in extending deepest sympathy to Kathy and to all members of the Aston family.

Members and officers of the House standing in their places,

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned at 3.30 p.m.

QUESTION UPON NOTICE

The following question upon notice and answer was circulated in *Questions and Answers* this day.

CAMPBELLTOWN AIR MONITORING

Mr PRIMROSE asked the **Minister for Environment and Assistant Minister for Transport**—

- (1) Will he undertake the monitoring of air pollution in the Campbelltown local government area prior to the opening of the glass plant at Ingleburn?
- (2) If so—
 - (a) when will this occur; and
 - (b) what equipment will be used?

Answer—

By leave, the Minister answered this question in the House on 19 May, 1988.
