



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Sciacca, Hon. Concetto Antonio 'Con', AO

SPEECH

Wednesday, 9 August 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 9 August 2017</p> <p>Page 135</p> <p>Questioner</p> <p>Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House</p> <p>Proof Yes</p> <p>Responder</p> <p>Question No.</p>
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Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (16:05): I am honoured to stand today to talk in respect and memory of Con Sciacca. It would have been the beginning of 1991 when I first met Con and his son, Sam, was in my year at school at Nudgee college. The first time I met Con—the members opposite will probably enjoy this—I had made a speech at the start of the school year to the school community, and parents and friends must have been there, too. Having made that speech—probably being school captain, I would say, is why I had that gig—Con came up afterwards. I had never met the man and didn't know who he was. Con called out to me. I turned around and went over, as you do, and introduced myself. He didn't introduce himself. He just said, 'Mate, you need to join the Labor Party!' So they were Con's first words to me. The great thing was, when I explained, 'Well, Mr Sciacca,' once I had come to know who he was, 'I'm, actually, the other way inclined when it comes to politics,' he was brilliant. He made it very clear, when I told him I am not a Labor man, that that's okay by him; as long as I'm a good bloke, that's all right by Con. That was Con, and it was Con ever after.

I stand in this chamber today not as a person for the Labor movement. I don't stand here as a relative of Con's, nor do I stand here today as a previous parliamentary colleague of Con's. Con, later in life, whether it be by SMS, email or in person, would refer to me as 'old mate'. So maybe I stand here today as one of his many old mates—not an old mate that Con would necessarily ring up to confide in and share his deepest thoughts. Yet such was the man that when you met him you would know that he was completely open, brutally open, with his honesty, which was just so valuable. An old mate, I suppose, I may have been to Con, not in the sense that he would ring me up and we would knock around together, but once you did socialise with Con, such was the man that he would make you feel as though you were the centre of the earth. He would make you feel so special. That's who he was. He was such a generous, larger-than-life, charismatic character.

Where I think my relationship with Con developed, strangely enough, was through the tragedy of death. In 1991, when Con's son, Sam, and I were in the same year at Nudgee college, a student in our year, Adam Monahan, sadly took his own life by jumping off the Gateway Bridge in Brisbane. This had an enormous effect on the school community, not to mention the family. Con, being in this parliament and able to wield a bit of influence, went to great lengths to ensure that barriers were installed either side of that Gateway Bridge. The numbers of people who sought to jump off that bridge dropped by somewhere over 85 per cent within a year of them being installed. Thus, through the tragedy that occurred with that family and that boy, Adam, who was a friend of ours at school, Con delivered. He got a tangible outcome that has subsequently, no doubt, saved lives. When you think of the 2½ thousand or more Australians who take their lives every single year, that is nearly seven a day. Con Sciacca sought to do his bit.

A year later, in 1992, of greater personal tragedy to Con was the passing of his son, Sam, who was in my year, from a rare bone cancer. You can imagine the impact this had on Con. Con was, in my view, first and foremost a family man. Losing his boy, Sam—or, Sammy, as he would call him—had an enormous impact on Con. It was a pleasure to attend the launch of a fellowship that he started soon thereafter, with the Labor Party, in honour of his son. Sam was not unlike Con. Does anyone remember grade 12 videos? You may have done one at school yourselves. We did a video in our year 12, when Sammy was going through his treatment. As soon as the video camera came around, he had no problems with taking his hat off and showing his bald head. He was then an 18-year-old boy, one year from passing away. He knew what his limited future held. But his was a big personality. He had a big smile. He was happy for the world to see his shaved head. Before Christmas, as I sat with Con Sciacca on his patio at the top of the tower in the CBD—Con sat with his shirt off, totally relaxed, just like Sammy—he spoke very openly about looking forward to the day when he would be reunited with him.

So, I say from this side of the House, but probably more personally just from me and maybe also from those whom I went to school with, that we send our greatest sympathies to the Sciacca family. It was a privilege to attend the funeral. Con was about family. He was about friends, which I came to realise. As we saw on 30 June at St Stephen's Cathedral, he was also a man of faith. Family, faith and friends. God bless Con Sciacca and may he rest in peace. Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the member for those very heartfelt remarks.