



MR. GORDON IS ENTITLED TO BE HEARD !

Margaret Reynolds

Labor Senator for Queensland 1983-99¹

As a resident North Queenslander for thirty five years I am always keen to follow news of my adopted state especially when it relates to politics which so engrossed my years living there. The stunning defeat of pink jumpsuit advocate, Campbell Newman by Annastacia Palaszczuk was a most welcome sign that Northerners had revolted against extremist policies.

But not all news from the deep North is so reassuring.

Far North Queensland made national headlines last week with allegations about the background and personal life of Member for Cook, Billy Gordon.

I totally understand the initial reaction of Premier Palaszczuk in distancing her new government from any hint of scandal. She governs with a very slim margin and the uncertainty of an Independent Speaker and two members of the Katter Party.

Of course all members of the government would be concerned by the implications of these accusations about the Member for Cook. But this is not the first or last time that a government will be embarrassed and potentially threatened by scandal. The media have in their usual style played 'gotcha' reporting without analyzing the circumstances of Mr Gordon and respecting the presumption of innocence until proven guilty in a court of law.

I have never met the Member for Cook and if allegations made against him are upheld then he will have to take full responsibility.

However screaming headlines about 'criminality' which date back to offences as a juvenile demonstrate how easy it is for the modern media to try and convict an individual because sensational journalism demands attention. And yes there are also allegations about failure to pay child support! Unfortunately many Australians avoid this responsibility as over one billion dollars is owed nationally in late or outstanding payments. Indeed just how many journalists (and indeed parliamentarians!) have a clear conscience in that regard? Again if this accusation against the Member for Cook is proven there are specific procedures which will ensure that payment of child support is regularized from his parliamentary salary.

It is most unfortunate that this essentially private matter has been so magnified and used to destabilize a new government. Both sides of politics have indicated they will not accept the vote of Mr. Gordon now he has chosen to remain in parliament as an Independent. Why should the people in the electorate of Cook be so disempowered? Mr. Gordon is the democratically elected voice of Far North Queensland and as such he is entitled to be heard and his vote recorded. The electorate of Cook is vast and remote and its people the most disadvantaged in Queensland. Many challenging issues of distance, isolation and poverty face the residents. They need a vocal

¹ Mobile contact 0418181843.

and active member of parliament who will speak out and demand reform that offers improved standards of living.

It is not appropriate for either the Premier or Leader of the Opposition to determine whether or not a vote is "legitimate" and therefore acceptable to them. At the present time Mr. Gordon represents the people of Cook who have a right to have their elected representative included in the democratic decision making of the Queensland Parliament.

Mr Gordon's future as the Member for Cook may be affected by a decision of the court or the views of the voters at the next election.

In the meantime Billy Gordon is entitled to a 'fair go' and the people of Cook certainly need to have their chosen representative heard in the parliament.