



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

GRANT TAMBLING AM

TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to Hon Grant Ernest John Tambling AM, who passed away on 24 January 2025. Although I did not have the opportunity to get to know Grant personally, we all acknowledge that he was a dedicated man of service who made significant contributions to the Northern Territory and Australia throughout his long career.

Grant was also a husband, father, grandfather and a friend to many. From what people have told me, Grant was known by all who met him as an absolute gentleman. He served as the Member for Fannie Bay in the first Northern Territory's Legislative Assembly from 1974 to 1977, paving the way for those who followed in his footsteps, including me.

Grant's achievements demonstrate his lifelong commitment to the development and governance of the Northern Territory, for which he continued to advocate throughout his political career. As the current Member for Fannie Bay, I am honoured to continue the legacy of service that Grant Tambling began in the electorate. His commitment to our community and his tireless advocacy for the Northern Territory serves as an inspiration to all of us in public office.

Grant Tambling's passion for the development and progress of the Northern Territory was evident throughout his career. He held executive responsibilities for Community Development, Finance and Local Government during his time in the Legislative Assembly. His work laid the foundation for the growth and prosperity we see in Fannie Bay and across the Territory.

As we remember Grant Tambling's contributions to his family, I pledge to carry forward his spirit of dedication to our community. I will do this by working tirelessly to ensure that Fannie Bay remains safe, secure and thriving. Grant's legacy reminds us of the impact that one person can have on their community and their nation. As the Member for Fannie Bay, and as I am sure that Grant would have, I will remain engaged in community services and focus on issues that are important to Territorians.

Grant was known for his fierce advocacy and willingness to challenge ideology. He was a strong advocate for all his constituents and for the Territory as a whole. I am sure that I speak on the behalf of everyone in the Chamber when I say that we sincerely thank Grant Tambling for his service. Even more so, we thank his family for giving him to the NT and allowing him to do what he loved. The NT is a better place for having Grant Tambling as a part of its history.

I place on my record my appreciation of Grant's long and meritorious public service and tender my profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, thank you to everyone in the House for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you to everyone in the gallery who is joining us tonight for the opportunity to share in this occasion.

I speak in memory of Grant Tambling AM. As we have heard around the House, Grant served as an alderman with Darwin City Council from 1972 to 1974, before being elected to the first Territory Assembly from 1974 to 1977 as the Member for Fannie Bay. He then became the deputy leader of the CLP for two years before moving to the House of Representatives for four years, and he then moved again to Canberra in 1987 until 2001 as a senator. He served in all three levels of government, plus as an Administrator in Norfolk Island between 2003 and 2007. Goodness me!

Tonight I will not detail his long list of services and offices, as others have already done so exhaustively. I will spare us another one of those. Instead, I will provide a couple of brief personal reflections, because I had the opportunity to know him a little over time. I want to draw on two things: his generosity, and his intellectual depth.

Politicians are busy people, and in the time that Grant served he was often representing even more constituents than some of us. But even with a larger number of people to represent, he always made time for others. That is a common refrain, I have found. He made time to go out bush and be in the city. He made time. Indeed, he made time for me as well. He helped me enormously with some of my early career research.

I remember visiting Grant and Sandy in their apartment in the Sentinel building, and I remember interviewing him on the balcony, many times over, for the first major piece of research I did about welfare reform in north Australia. It was something he was very passionate about as well because he was a parliamentary secretary involved in that area for an awfully long time. The depth of his knowledge was profound, and he was always extremely generous with sharing his insights and his connections, which were very helpful when I needed interviews with people who otherwise would not open doors for me. He was generous in that regard and a loyal CLP stalwart for years—for decades, in fact.

It is worth remembering that he was genuinely committed to bipartisan cooperation for the benefit of Territorians in a way that few Territory representatives have been, and he is to be commended for that. I was reminded of this fact by Sandy just the other day. She kindly spoke to me at an International Women's Day event. We were talking about the fact that Grant took the time to get out and about in the bush, and it teased out the idea that this partly happened because he and some of his colleagues fought for better terms and conditions to be able to represent the Northern Territory.

I wanted to take Sandy up on that point, so I hunted down former Senator Trish Crossin—who crossed over with Grant Tambling for a term—to get some of her reflections and find out how much of that was real. I am grateful to former Senator Crossin for sharing some generous reflections. She pointed out that by the time she got to the Senate, Grant was a real stalwart; he had been there for a long time, and he was a senior figure. Despite all of that, he was extremely generous in offering counsel and guidance to somebody from the opposing party, no less, in Canberra, because they shared a common interest in fighting the Territory's corner. Down in Canberra, it was the two of them against the rest of them, as he saw it.

I was told by former Senator Crossin that Grant used to maintain a spreadsheet of issues relevant to the Territory across all the federal portfolios. Can you imagine if you were new to the Senate and relatively clueless, having been parachuted in, having to come in and try to be across all of that? He used to share that information so they could champion ideas. Sometimes, even when they were not ideas that he could champion, he would feed them off to her so she could do something with it. He was a skilful politician.

Speaking to that remote engagement, they worked together on some practical nuts and bolts stuff, like vehicle access to get out bush and work the city. I note today that our Chief Minister had to fight our corner with the Remuneration Tribunal, and they did the same thing in Canberra to try to get some of their air charter entitlement turned into a vehicle allowance so they could get out bush more often. It was a time of bipartisan cooperation in the background.

Former Senator Crossin also shared that Grant did extensive work on copyright vis-a-vis Indigenous art. Again, that was research shared, and it continues to affect our landscape to this day. One of her final observations was in relation to her own maiden speech. At the end of it, Senator Tambling came over and said, 'It was a great speech; well done, but just quietly, you might have said something about the Katherine floods.'

Senator Crossin, at the time did not know what to make of it, but then got advice from Senator Tambling that she could still make up for it by speaking about it in a special adjournment. She had to query what a special adjournment was. He was extremely generous across the board in that regard; that is worth reflecting on.

They got into a bit of trouble. They had such a collegiate relationship that there were some incidents when they alternated images of one another stuck to one side of the House or the other, trying to goad each other into voting for things they were not allowed to vote for. Perhaps it is a tactic we should start employing around here. Her key observation at the end of it all was that Grant Tambling 'never played the person, only the ball'. I think that is testament to his character.

Another thing I want to reflect on is his depth. Politicians are increasingly lightweight in the modern era when committing their ideas to paper. It is too difficult, too risky and you get caught out. Grant Tambling was somebody who did not shy away from putting his thoughts out in the public domain to be tested.

I was the beneficiary of some of his work. I dug out a couple of things he gave me that, honestly, I am still referring to even to this day.

In his capacity as shadow minister for Regional Development, External Territories and North Australia, he wrote discussion papers that tackled big issues like social security, welfare and poverty in north Australia. These are reports from the 1990s. It is interesting that some of the things they go through are still pertinent to us today. There is lots to be learned; there is wisdom to be gained from these documents that he, his staff and his office worked on.

They engaged with tax reform; Commonwealth Grants Commission models and whether they are fair; contributors to poverty; the high cost of service delivery in the Northern Territory; remote tax allowances; zone tax allowances; and even truancy and non-attendance at schools. Issues concerning Aboriginal people and Aboriginal poverty were also forefront in his mind, and he did not shy away from committing his thoughts and ideas to paper. He was a man of conviction.

Probably my favourite quote of his that I have is in this discussion paper from what used to be called the North Australian Research Unit based at the Australian National University. This is from the 1998 discussion

paper 11, 'A Social Policy Research Agenda to take the Territory, and the Nation, into the 21st Century'. It is a comprehensive paper written. It is worth reflecting on when we think about some of the things that we do in this House, because if we are not mindful of what people have done in the past, we are doomed to repeat mistakes.

There are a couple of quotes I want to draw out, because they are worth mentioning. The first is:

The unique characteristics of the Northern Territory—with high Aboriginal and ethnic population components—demand constant testing of needs and equity matters.

We are still fighting that fight all this time later. It is worth remembering that we stand on the shoulders of giants in building some of these arguments to prosecute our arguments better with the federal government—all the more worth remembering on a night when the federal budget is being released.

Here is another quote I drew out of this paper. In his opinion:

It is our role as politicians, academics, policy advisers, bureaucrats and leaders to ensure that we develop social policy that is adaptable and flexible enough to meet the demands of our changing world and region. We must address the needs of all in our policies and in doing so ensure effective and efficient service delivery.

A final quote I want to draw out of here is about the gravity of his role:

I do not take lightly my responsibility as a Federal Senator. It saddens me to see the politics of division that is being practised by the One Nation Party. Pauline Hanson and her advisers are showing a total lack of social responsibility by promoting a return to economic and social policies which would see Australia quickly attain the status of a world pariah and make the prospect of Paul Keating's banana republic look positively cheery.

Grant Tambling was a heavyweight. More than just being a skilful politician, he was a true parliamentarian and a servant of the public in the truest sense. He was a man of principle, conviction and sincere dedication to the Northern Territory.

I offer my sincere condolences to Sandy, Coryn, Amalia, Reuben, Hamish and Castiella. Verily to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.

Vale, Grant Tambling.

Madam SPEAKER: I also extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Hon Grant Tambling.

Motion agreed to.

Members stood for one minute's silence as a sign of respect.

Madam SPEAKER: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this evening's motion. Light refreshments are available in the Main Hall for the family and friends.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE **Investment in Healthcare**

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker; I extend my condolences to Grant Tambling's family. He was a fantastic champion of the Territory. If we can follow in his footsteps we will be doing very well.

The matter of public importance asks that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare meets the current and projected needs of all Territorians. I think I speak on behalf of the whole Assembly, because we have a number of things in common, when I say that we all want a first-class health system to serve all Territorians. I believe we all want well-staffed hospitals and healthcare facilities; the Territory to be a place where health professionals want to come to work and live, rather than leave; short waiting times; and, noting that my son is a paramedic, to reduce the need for ramping services to support our hospitals. I think we all have the same aspiration.