

NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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HANSARD EXTRACT

TRISH CROSSIN AM

WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 2026

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

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, DARWIN NT 0800

The idea that people deserve support, dignity and fairness at work sat at the centre of her life's work. The story of the Working Women's Centre says a lot about Trish Crossin. She described how she and others saw an ad for funding only days before applications closed. This was when working women's centres were first being established in Australia. In four days they pulled together a submission because they knew that Territory women needed somewhere to go. I heard her many times tell the story of wrestling with the fax machine at the final hour to get the submission in.

The Northern Territory Working Women's Centre, an amazing organisation, continues, and we have heard how much it is valued from across the floor of the Chamber. It had many fights to survive, and Trish was with it every time. She reflected on the fight that women in the Territory did not want to let it go because they understood that the centre was a part of people's rights in this town.

When we talk about people in public life we often focus on elections, titles and parliamentary careers, but often the most important contributions people make are the institutions they help build, the structures they help change, the doors they help open and the people they empower long after they have moved on. Trish Crossin understood that deeply. She said, 'If you walk away and you shut the door, where do people go, and where do women go?' Those words speak to Trish Crossin's broader philosophy of public life, that people deserve advocacy, fairness, someone to stand up for them and somewhere to turn to when systems fail them.

As we have heard, Trish also went on to serve as a Senator for the Northern Territory from 1998 to 2014, representing the Territory through years of significant national debate and advocating strongly on issues, including education, workplace rights, women's equality and social justice. She was always a fierce advocate for the Northern Territory. We will all remember her as someone who believed deeply in standing up for what was right and fighting hard for the issues she cared about.

Condolence motions remind us that behind every career, parliamentary or otherwise, is a whole life of work, contribution, relationships and conviction.

I extend my sincere condolences to Mark, Trish's children and all her family, friends and former colleagues and all those mourning her loss.

I acknowledge the legacy she leaves behind in the parliamentary records, workplaces, organisations, community and lives that she helped change for the better. That baton now sits with all of us who care about fairness, dignity and justice in our community.

Thank you, Trish, for the legacy you leave behind and for the inspiration to keep going.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank everybody who has made time to come here and be part of this condolence motion to remember Trish Crossin.

I usually give fairly structured forensic speeches, but I will take a leaf out of my old friend Trish Crossin's book and just relax and wing it, as she used to tell me more often than not.

Trish and I went back a long way. She was my kindergarten teacher at Karama Primary School, but not for long. We worked it out many years after the fact. When she was transitioning from Yirrkala she did a brief stint at Karama, where we crossed over.

We reconnected in 2002 when I was a university student doing data collection for research work on welfare reform in north Australia. I needed a way to speak to all the important people, as it were. That thesis was supervised by a guy called Bill Pritchard—now Professor Bill Pritchard—who worked briefly for Warren Snowdon. He got me in the door, and Carol Burke kindly introduced me to some people. A lot of that cast of characters—Carol Burke, Warren Snowdon, Marion Scrymgour, Jack Ah Kit, Denis Burke and Grant Tambling—all those people from that time helped me with that study, but nobody helped me more with it than Trish did.

Trish helped to facilitate introductions for me in the bush. Even though I had grown up in Darwin, I had not spent any time out in communities. I did not have a strong connection to Tangentyere or in the Barkly. She was great because she had such great street cred and people genuinely believed in her. She made introductions for me and helped me get out there and collect real data.

Trish went one better when she significantly championed that work of mine. Together, unexpectedly, we ended up using it to do some good. It was a surprise. It was my first real crack at doing something at research

level. You can get delusions of grandeur that suddenly everything you do will change the world or have a material impact. It was helpful. She championed that work which related to welfare stuff, Centrelink at the time and things that were being done to reform that space. Together we could change government policy to have more people in places like Barunga and Beswick and get more visitations from remote visiting teams. It was a great learning experience. It helped change service delivery and gave me delusions of grandeur. I thought, 'I can definitely do more of this and fix more problems'. Partly as a consequence, I left after that in the mid-2000s to do a PhD in the UK.

I came back a couple of years later on holidays in 2007. She was good at this kind of thing; I did not tell her I was back, but she figured out I was back. She had probably written a bunch of references for me and kept tabs on me because she was good at maintaining connections. I got a cold call. She invited me to her electorate office in Palmerston. Before I knew it, I had been hoodwinked into becoming an electorate officer for Trish Crossin for six months or so while I was on that break.

It was an interesting time. I learned a tonne at her knee. It was the lead-up to the Kevin 07 election. A lot of exciting changes were happening with the end of one era and moving into a different era. I cannot say that I contributed anything much to that office, but I learned a tonne. Actually, I contributed one thing. There was an internal staff pool to pick all the seats in the federal election; I managed to get 150 out of 150. It is the only time I have ever gotten anything right. I have no form for gambling at all. I learned a tonne. I was tempted while I was there. I thought, 'This is good. I have learned a lot. Maybe I would like to stay involved', but I went back to the UK. My trip back to the UK was short-lived because my father got cancer and I had to come back.

By this point Trish had been made Chair of the Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. She did not have a lawyer. I was not a lawyer, but I was the closest thing she could find at the time. Again, she tricked me and said, 'Why not come and work for me in parliament during the sittings?' It was too good an opportunity to turn down. I went and learned a tonne there. I was privileged to have a ringside seat to things like the Apology in February 2008.

I went there as a legal and research adviser. Technically, I was supposed to provide counsel, speechwriting and legal advice and to liaise with the Attorney-General and the Immigration minister's office and the office of the PM, but that is not what I learned there with her. I learned much more broadly than the tasks.

The first thing I learned was how important networks and relationships are. In the mornings Trish would send me off on little missions to have coffee with people all around the parliament. She would say, 'Today, I want you to go and talk to so-and-so in such-and-such office'. I did not see the utility in it at first; I did not understand what I was doing. However, with time I started to realise that getting things done in parliament is about building networks and relationships and finding out who is who in the zoo and that it is not just combative nonsense the whole time. Any of you who have been to Parliament House in Canberra will know that Aussies is the main coffee shop. For the most part I spent my time in there, but I learned a tonne in doing so.

On the flip side of that networks thing—this was brought up before—she taught me not to suffer fools. She was not about wasting time on people who would waste your time. She was not about people who were basically just yanking your chain. I was lucky because she wrote me a lot of references over the years. I remember almost every one of them had the same 'Tanzil does not suffer fools' and that kind of thing. It was something I learned from her.

Another thing I learned from her—as anyone who worked with Trish or has been proximate to her will know—was my efficient file management system. She would take pieces of paper, have a quick look at them, rip them up and put them in the bin. She would do that repeatedly. It was fantastic, and I learned to sticky tape a lot of things back together. I am now passing that on to other people who work alongside me.

On a more serious note, one of the things I saw is that you cannot be a senator for 15 years and have that sort of longevity without having great work–life balance. She was good at being devoted to her work and knowing when to switch on and when to switch off, and she was devoted to her family. One of the things that stays with me the most about the time I worked with her is how she always prioritised her family without ever being derelict in her duties and her job. I would go so far as to say that she was the best working mum I have ever worked for. I was impressed by how she juggled all her duties. She managed all the things that were happening with her—I think it is fair to say—at times chaotic kids; they were a real handful, but a great bunch. She prioritised family and work–life balance, and I think it was the key to her longevity in many ways. I will try, Trish, to do better on work–life balance.

The final and biggest thing I learned from working with her, probably more than anyone else in and around politics in this country or any other place, was that if you want to get anything done, you have to learn to work

across the aisle. You have to respect the game, but you have to fight clean wherever possible as well. She was good at that. I watched her do it for many years.

I watched her interactions with Grant Tambling behind the scenes; Grant was in the earlier phase from me, but they still maintained a working relationship. It was the same with Nigel Scullion. A lot of the things that they achieved in the parliament were about them banding together for team Territory. We are a small jurisdiction, and she knew that, and there was no way anyone would take her seriously in Canberra unless we got our ducks in a row. They were the standard bearers in that era for working together in parliament for the betterment of the Territory. I was grateful to learn up close and personal from her that lesson about getting things done by respecting the game.

I do not think I am telling tales out of school. In 2008 the late Graeme Lewis, who a lot of people in this room know and who had known me also since I was a kid, reached out to me asking me how I would like to go from Sanderson Primary and Sanderson High to trying to be the Member for Sanderson. The irony was at that time I was working for Trish. I told her about it. I said, 'I got this call. It was flattering. I am tempted. I think I would like to be involved in politics.' She came back to me with a counteroffer, saying, 'If you are interested, maybe you could have a tilt with us instead'.

A remarkable thing happened when she came back the next day and sat me down and said to me, 'Go back to Oxford. Finish your PhD. Politics will still be here. Education is a precious thing. You have the chance to get a special education. Go get your education and come back. If you want to make a contribution in the future, then do so.' I value that because she had the power of persuasion over me at that point to say, 'Run in this election; it will be great. Your life will be good'. That was great life advice, and I needed it from someone like her. She cared about people. She cared about her staff. She was one of the best bosses I have ever had.

One of the things I have not got across to you is how much fun she was. She was an incredibly fun person to work for. It was always a bit of a hoot and a bit chaotic, but it was always grounded in substance and sincerity as well.

She was gracious in providing me opportunity throughout my life from kindergarten onwards, and she was a longtime referee and supporter.

In 2024 when I finally decided to put up my hand, she was the first person on the Labor side to get in touch and say, 'Congratulations. I am glad you were preselected. Do good.' She said at the time, which I believe, that she was committed to good people being in politics. I do not think Robyn will mind me saying this. Trish said, 'I would like to see people like Robyn Cahill and you in parliament. It does not matter who you are representing.' There was a small part of her which probably was annoyed that she did not try harder in 2008 or 2012 to shoehorn me in on the other side. She was committed to good people being in politics and fighting for the Territory because she believed in the promise of the Territory. I think she believed in it right to the end. She always accepted and knew that I was more liberal democrat than comrade, but she did not mind. The key thing was that she wanted us to do good. She was always there with a lot of support in the background.

She kept tabs, as I said; she was good like that. In June last year I had the opportunity to go to Melbourne when I got a spot on the McKinnon Institute APL course. She rang to congratulate me, which was kind of her. Then she said, 'Come down and stay with us and visit'. I did not do any of that, and I deeply regret it.

I did not think she would pass at 70. I was shocked by the manner in which she passed away, and I am sad about it.

In the last conversation I had with her, which would have been about June last year, aside from all the care she showed towards me and what was happening here, as always she gushed effusively about her kids. She was so proud of her kids. She talked with such fondness about what they were all up to. I do not want to single out anyone, but at the same time I think she was proud that Kate was in federal parliament as well. That made her proud, right to the end.

To Mark, Mandy, Kate and Mel and Paul, her family and all the people who loved, knew, respected and cared for her, my condolences.

I will miss you, Trish. Vale, and thanks very much for being there for me.