

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Monday, February 26, 1973

[The House met at 2:30 o'clock.]

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

HON. LEONARD F. WERRY

MR. SPEAKER:

Because of the sad mishap which has befallen our esteemed colleague, the hon. Minister of Telephones and Utilities, it is appropriate that our opening prayer this afternoon consist of a tribute of two minutes of silence during which all of us may pray in our own ways.

[A two minute silence followed.]

MR. SPEAKER:

Amen.

MR. LOUGHEED:

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, a tragedy has struck this Assembly and this province, and most significantly the family of Len Werry.

I know all of us express our sympathies in every way we can to his family. Len will be very much missed by us all, not just, I think it is fair for me to say, by the people on the floor of this Assembly, but by the people around this building, the people everywhere who had the good fortune to come to know him. We thank God that his children survived the accident without any serious injury. We all know that at Len's very last instant his only thought would be for the children. I know we have faith that he knows they survived.

In the last few hours we have had many tributes. Just before I came into the Assembly I had a call from Alf Hooke who used to be on the receiving end of many of Len's questions. He wanted me to pass on his view that -- as he described it -- Len was just a great guy.

I was pleased, as all of us were, to read the tribute from the Mayor of Edmonton this morning about Len Werry, in which he says:

Here was one of the finest men in Canadian public life. He will leave a place that will be difficult to fill. I had the opportunity to work with him in many areas and particularly closely in a delicate conflict situation, that of the jurisdiction over telephone service in the Edmonton area. Here the man was magnificent, fair, understanding, kind but firm. A man of magnificence has left us early.

I think perhaps few in Alberta realized the growing importance, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Assembly, of his portfolio, the important work he had been doing with regard to rural gas and extended area services and the Public Utilities Board. He has left us, however, with much good progress in a short time as a cabinet minister, but with much important work to do.

I know that all members have a deep sense of loss on an occasion like this, because there is a particular affinity about being on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, a sort of special bond that develops, despite the battle of words that wage on this floor. That special bond is created with members that you serve with as fellow honourable members in this Legislative Assembly.

So often I think that the human drama that is involved is perhaps not as well observed.

Len Werry has a special story. His is a special story, for his whole life really was a struggle. He climbed many mountains. I don't think I put anybody down by saying that I doubt that there was anybody who climbed and struggled harder to gain a seat in this Legislative Assembly than Len Werry in the 1967 election, in the then constituency of Calgary Bowness. He showed me his two sets of shoes, both of which had been worn through.

I know that that was reflected, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Assembly, in his maiden speech, which I dug out this morning. On the 22nd of February, 1968, he said:

Mr. Speaker, I would hope to say at this time that I consider it an honour and a privilege to sit and stand here with this august body of legislators to debate and approve legislation that will affect Albertans today, as well as those that will reside here many years from now.

And then he went on with reference to a one-room school, and Len said:

It brought me back to my childhood when I went and took my Grade 1 in such a one-room school at Cereal. The school at that time was half a mile away from our farm. There were 15 in the class. However, at the end of the first year, one family moved out of the district and took 13 students with them, and there were only two left. So they closed the school. For the next few years myself and a miserable little Shetland pony had to go another five miles to another one-room school.

Mr. Speaker, that history of struggle was, of course, reflected in the way in which he presented himself in this House, particularly in terms of social programs. I know on many occasions I introduced him as the humanist within the caucus of our original six.

He made important contributions in many ways. Some members will remember serving with him on a committee regarding workmen's compensation. I know he convinced many of us of the important need to make major reforms in the areas of workmen's compensation and other fields such as that. I know that his advice was sought by all of us who wanted to get a feeling about the problems facing people who were struggling in our society.

Mr. Speaker, it is a sad occasion, but I know that Len would like me to try, very briefly, to reflect perhaps his wonderful sense of humour, his wonderful humour in a situation.

Last week we had one of those incidents when our Attorney General was being somewhat on the defensive. He stood up, thought he had a quiet time and introduced a school; and the school wasn't here. He turned pretty red.

Well, I can remember, and I told the Attorney General, and reminded Len about it last week, that that really was nothing compared to Mr. Werry's first introduction in this House. He sat over there where the Member for Clover Bar sits -- and he will remember the incident. He jumped to his feet and he said, "Mr. Speaker, finally a group from my constituency. And Mr. Speaker (and the Member for Calgary Millican will remember this) not a small group -- a huge group of 140. And I understand they have come up here all the way from Calgary, and they haven't even bothered to eat. They're in both galleries and let's give them a tremendous ovation. I ask all 140 of them to stand." And there wasn't a sound. Pandemonium reigned throughout this Legislature for about ten minutes.

But what really caught all of us wasn't that event. It was the next day, when he had to stand with that wonderful smile of his, and they were here, and he made the introduction as only Len could. Our memories, Mr. Speaker, will be of that smile. That humour will always be with us.

His children meant so very much to him and almost all the hours he spent outside his work were spent frequently working and playing with his boys in sports. The tragedy occurred when he was taking four of them up to a ski day in Jasper.

He has left, Mr. Speaker, a wonderful legacy in five children, but he's left something else. He has left a unique legacy to all of those whose life was touched by the presence of Len Werry -- to be just a little bit kinder and a little bit more compassionate to our fellow human beings. What greater achievement in a lifetime could a man have? God bless him.

MR. HENDERSON:

Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say a word of thanks to the Premier for phoning me early yesterday afternoon to inform me of the bad news we are all sharing at this moment.

I think the first thing that came to my mind, Mr. Speaker, is the reality that in moments such as this there are no two sides to this House. As the Premier has said, there is a bond that develops, regardless of the tickering and the arguing back and forth between members of this club, which really makes it unique.

My knowledge of Mr. Werry dates back to his election to the House in 1967, to which the Premier has referred. I think the one characteristic that comes to my mind the most about Len Werry as a man was his empathy for the down-and-out. I recall very distinctly the number of Mr. Werry's quiet but very sincere and impassioned speeches, questioning, probing and speaking on a particular aspect.

We all came to know him as a friend whom we respected, a man of integrity and of deep sincerity, and as the Premier said, a man with an almost bashful but touching sense of humour which showed through under the most trying circumstances.

I can only say, Mr. Speaker, that I am sure we all join in mourning the untimely loss of Mr. Werry. His family has lost a father; the people of Alberta have lost a dedicated and loyal public servant. We here, in particular, have all lost a friend. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to Mr. Werry's family on this occasion. May he rest in peace. He has certainly served the interests of his fellow man in an exemplary manner which I am sure we are all going to long remember.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my deep regret at the untimely loss of the hon. Minister of Telephones and Utilities. We all feel a sense of loss at the passing of a valued member of this Assembly, as well as a conscientious minister of the Crown. He was respected by all members of the House.

I extend my sympathy to the family in this their hour of grief. I know that they will find consolation, Mr. Speaker, in the knowledge that the hon. Member for Calgary Foothills lived a good and decent life, and played a very significant role in the public affairs of our province.

MR. HYNDMAN:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words in tribute to Len Werry as a colleague, a friend, and I think, a special person. Above all, he was, I think, a man of warmth and humanity because it seemed to me always, that no matter how pressing the demands on his time, he was always prepared to take time to help those in some kind of distress.

I recall especially the years from 1967 to 1971, when Len was always a little bit late for caucus meetings because he had to be almost pried off the telephone. Almost invariably he was on the telephone, perhaps talking to a constituent, but on many occasions he was talking to someone else in Alberta who had heard that Len would listen, offering patient and quiet advice. Many of his calls, I remember, were in relation to the Workmen's Compensation Board in which he took a special interest. I think it is to his credit that he personally played a very special part in revamping legislation that gave the Ombudsman jurisdiction in those kinds of cases. When that happened, Len was happy because it helped people.

Not only did he assist people as an MLA, but also many Albertans whose names maybe we will never know. They could testify to the many hours which he unselfishly spent over and beyond his own personal feelings, giving advice and counsel of one kind or another. It almost seemed as if helping people was a special mission in life for Len Werry.

This was also evident, I think, in terms of the way he would assist his colleagues. I remember as an uninitiated MLA in the fall of 1967, being completely confused by the public accounts and interim statements. Len took me aside and freely spent some hours -- missed a plane -- in leading me through the intricacies, applying his accounting knowledge and assisting me in public financing.

He was also a man who had, I think, an unique tenacity of purpose in the sense that to Len each day seemed to be chock-full of good works to perform and accomplishments to carry out. He always seemed to me to be remarkable in the way he would try to get 61 minutes out of every hour and 25 hours out of every day. It seemed to him that there was always so much to learn and so much to do and so many people to help.

In the way in which he felt that pursuing knowledge and acquiring information was a lifelong thing, I think he was ahead of his time. He wasn't content with the kind of formal education which would satisfy most men, rather he would always be taking advanced courses at the university. He was always striving to keep up to date and to add more dimensions to his knowledge and experience. One always had the feeling that it wasn't for his own personal satisfaction, it was so that he could better help other people.

We shall miss him, Mr. Speaker, the friendly tiger at the end of the front row. I think his contribution to Alberta public life was too short but, as their servant, I think he gave Albertans his special qualities in full measure.

MR. DRAIN:

Mr. Speaker I, too, would like to acknowledge the magnificent contribution that Len Werry has made in the short time that he was a member of this Legislature. I had the pleasure and satisfaction of working with him on two review committees, and I could not help but admire the dedication and perseverance with which he pursued his objective.

I think possibly because of a certain unity of background that we had, Len and I were probably closer than most people in understanding some of the fundamental problems we did have to deal with. There are not very many members in this Legislature who have choked on a 'high lead' or know what a 'high lead' is. However, Len Werry did do that. Also, the background of accounting, in which I have some small smatterings of knowledge, was something that established a rapport of communication which made us very close. It is with sincere sorrow, and with regret, that I have to acknowledge this magnificent contribution.

MR. RUSSELL:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments for a couple of moments, with your permission. I am going to refer specifically to six members of this Legislature. I am not doing that in an attempt to exclude the other members, but rather to try and share something very nice with the other members.

Len was one of what we called "the original six" back in 1967. Our common interest in politics, and in the affairs conducted by this Legislature, had brought us together from a very wide variety of walks of life. I recall so well those early years when we sat together in a little skinny row over there. Len and I sat next to each other at two desks. We shared the same office in this building. We lived together in the same hotel and used to share the same car going home every weekend.

During those years, Mr. Speaker, our common interest in the affairs of the province and in trying to work for the people of Alberta, worked towards developing a very special bond, a very strong bond, which some members perhaps know I am trying to express. During that time and until today we served under three different premiers. I think because of that we gained an appreciation of the variety of viewpoints, and the different methods of public service that do exist in Alberta.

But throughout that time -- and others have mentioned it -- Len was always the voice of human conscience in that small caucus, and later in our larger caucus as it expanded. When it was small naturally we got to know his family very well, and yesterday the five other members of "the original six" group met together to mourn the news of his loss. We knew his family very well and our sympathy goes directly to them. This Chamber and its activities brought us together and that is why I wanted to say those things in this room.

We are all better for having known him and we will miss him.

DR. PAFROSKI:

Mr. Speaker, hon. members. I, as a relatively new MLA in the Legislative Assembly, would also like to record a tribute to the hon. Len Werry, Minister of Telephones and Utilities.

To me, Mr. Speaker and hon. members, he was a first-rate friend, advisor and colleague. I can say that the ongoing advice he gave me was, without exception, the finest advice I have ever received, either as an MLA or as a medical doctor.

To his family, wife and children, I extend our sincerest sympathy and would indicate to them that he will not be forgotten and we all dearly miss him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WILSON:

Mr. Speaker, memories of the hon. Len Werry will always be of particular significance to me because our acquaintanceship and friendship extended to pre-political days.

I recall very well the first time I received a Social Credit nomination as a candidate. The last person I expected to get a telegram of congratulations from was the hon. Len Werry. But he sent me a telegram, and I sincerely appreciated that. Len has sort of been an advisor to me, off and on, ever since then.

I recall very well that in the first week I sat in this Legislature, I got a couple of notes from Len. One day he said, "Hey, Roy, relax a little bit." And, you know, that was very appropriate. A little later on, I recall, I got another note from him -- and perhaps members in the Legislature will appreciate the subtleties of these notes more than those outside -- but a little later on a note came across, "You're doing better, but just keep relaxing." So I was getting a continuous sort of advice and guidance, and I sincerely appreciated that.

When the hon. Premier made his comments, I thought that I would just like to add a couple of practical examples of the real humanitarian, the hon. Len Werry. That is the way I choose to remember him.

MR. TAYLOR:

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend my deepest sympathy to the loved ones of the late Mr. Len Werry. I have very many happy memories of working with Mr. Werry. I always appreciated his sense of humour.

But the thing that I will remember most is one time when he was in opposition. To exemplify what the hon. Premier said today about his love of those who were the underdogs, or those having difficult times. I remember when he stood in his place and told of young people who were being addicted by drugs. I can never forget the stirring address he gave, the tears he brought to the eyes of some members when he pleaded for the young people of the province who were becoming addicted, and urged that something be done. It was one of the things I'll always remember -- his desire to help those who sometimes couldn't even help themselves.

Alberta is richer because Len lived among us.

MR. LOUGHEED:

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that out of respect for our departed colleague, the hon. Len Werry, the House adjourn until tomorrow at 2:30 o'clock.

MR. SPEAKER:

May I assume that the motion by the hon. Premier, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, has the unanimous consent of the House?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER:

Before adjourning the House, I would like to identify myself with the tributes which have been expressed on both sides of the House.

My friendship with Mr. Werry dates back some ten years, when I became associated with him in the work of the national executive of the party to which we both belonged. During the years in between I have come to esteem him for his

warm, friendly and humorous personality, and to value him as a worthwhile friend.

I know that he lives on in his very fine family, and I shall say to them, and to the Members of the Assembly, that I shall miss him both as a friend, and as a member of this Assembly.

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 2:30 o'clock.

[The House rose at 3:01 o'clock.]