



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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affordable transport, growing communication links and, with these firmly in place over a number of years, prosperity. Let us remember that for them prosperity means the ability to buy modest amounts of the luxury items of soap, sugar, kerosene and clothing.

Adam contributed to this project and I am absolutely sure that that is why he believed he was there. His work has brought peace to the life of the islanders, and for this reason his loss is a tragedy. I extend my very deepest sympathy to his family and all his loved ones.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

Death of Mr Charlie Pahlman

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra - Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment and Minister for Arts, Heritage and Indigenous Affairs): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Charlie Pahlman, Deputy Director of the ACT Council of Social Service and Greens candidate for Melonglo in the 2004 ACT election and a committed social justice advocate and a very respected and valuable member of the Canberra community, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

Mr Pahlman was a committed social justice advocate and a very respected and valuable member of the Canberra community. He died tragically during a family holiday to Western Samoa on 19 January 2005.

Charlie Pahlman will be sadly missed by his partner, Pam Boyer, his children, Tina and Kari, their mother, Christine Pahlman, his parents, Anna Lena and Ragnar, and his brother, Andrew. He will also be missed by his colleagues at the ACT Council of Social Service and the ACT Greens.

In a tribute posted on the Charlie Pahlman Memorial web site, a friend reflected on Mr Pahlman's commitment to his passions. She said:

Charlie was a man of honesty and integrity. He did not just support various campaigns for environmental and social justice from the edge—he immersed himself in them and gave his skills, his time and his energy wholeheartedly. He lived his commitment in a way few ever do.

Charlie Pahlman was born in Sweden in 1960 and moved to Australia at the age of 10. During his life, he gathered many and varied experiences, which all served to fire his passions for social justice. He did everything from farming avocados on the New South Wales North Coast and becoming a stock rider on a cattle station in Queensland to even running a vegetarian cafe on the Hawkesbury River.

In the mid-1980s his love of travel and adventure took him to Asia, where he developed a passion for the Mekong region and the people of Thailand and Laos. He worked with the people there on the protection of their environment and their communities. Mr Pahlman brought all of these experiences with him to the ACT in 1996 where he took up the position as campaigns director for Community Aid Abroad.

His commitment to social justice then took a more local focus when he became the deputy director of the ACT Council of Social Service in 2001. ACTCOSS director, Ara Cresswell, said in a statement: "his unflagging belief that each community should determine their own future was an inspiration to all who had the chance to work with Charlie over the years". Another of his passions was for the process of reconciliation with Australia's indigenous people and he was an active member of Australians for Reconciliation and Native Title.

His love of Canberra translated into his bid to serve the local community through the ACT Legislative Assembly. He was a candidate in the seat of Molonglo for the Greens in the 2004 election. For our Assembly colleague Dr Foskey I know he was not only a running mate but also a cherished friend.

It is clear that Charlie Pahlman touched the lives of many, not only in this community but across the world. I did not personally know Charlie Pahlman, but I observed and listened to him during the election campaign and I liked what I saw and heard.

Charlie Pahlman was an active and valuable member of our community and he will be sorely missed. I again express my regret at his sudden and sad death.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo): I want to thank Mr Stanhope for moving a condolence motion for my friend and colleague Charlie Pahlman. It is right and fitting that the whole Assembly remember Charlie and note his passing, as I am sure that every member has had something to do with him; if they have not, they soon would have, had he not died.

Our hearts go out to Charlie's family and friends and I want to acknowledge that today we have a number of them here: Charlie's partner, Pam, his mum, Anna Lena, Pam's mum, Marjory, and a number of other friends. You will see that my staff have also joined them, because Charlie was close to us all.

Charlie's family and friends are a close circle and a spiralling network of thousands across the world. I especially think of his partner, Pam, and his mother and his daughters. I hope that you travel the long and bumpy road of grief assisted by good memories and compassionate friends.

Today I want to speak particularly on behalf of those in the social justice community who have worked with Charlie in the eight years since he came to Canberra, and to briefly outline the work that he did prior to coming to live in our city. In doing this, I want to stress the loss that we have endured as a community and as a world. I wish to emphasise, however, that there is no room for despair and to demonstrate that we will remember Charlie best by keeping his work for social justice going and by taking on some of his open enthusiasm, best expressed in his smile.

Why is it that the death of some people is harder to accept than that of others? Charlie is such a person. The first reaction of most people to the news was disbelief: how could someone so alive die? The second was profound loss. Many uttered the old cliché: only the good die young. That I reject. For one thing, it might discourage those of us who, humanly, would like long lives from behaving with integrity. For the other, it is patently

not true, although, unfortunately, those who seek to behave well towards the earth and their fellow humans are not immortal, as we would like them to be.

The truth is that it is always hard to lose someone we love, especially if that person should, by the law of averages, have years of life ahead of them. Charlie would have been 45 this year. Someone said: "We still expect Charlie to walk through the door. He has been away before and he has always come back before." Many of us still have emails from him on our desktops. I am very reluctant to delete the last email I received from him. In my diary is recorded a meeting I had with him on some of the community work he was doing just before he left for his holiday in Samoa.

Charlie was a brilliant networker and communicator. In this speech, I would like to tell his story in his own words, reading the bio that he wrote and polished for the ACT election last year, where he stood with Amanda Brennan and me as a candidate for Molonglo. Thousands of these bios were distributed. I really felt sure that, if people had known the qualities of the man, he would have been my colleague in office as well as on the hustings. These are his words:

I emigrated to Australia with my family when I was 10. After graduating from the University of Western Sydney with a degree in agriculture, I spent ten years in Thailand and Laos, working side by side with local communities to support appropriate economic and social development. During this time I formed a deep commitment to supporting local peoples in their struggles to protect and sustain their livelihoods, cultures and natural resources.

Rivers are a particular passion of mine, and during my time in South-East Asia I learned much about the importance of healthy watersheds and river systems, and how they are the life-line and arteries of our eco-systems. I also worked with local communities and non-government organisations to campaign against environmentally and socially destructive large-scale dams in the Mekong region.

I settled in Canberra in 1996 and currently live in Watson with my children. I have worked with a number of community organisations on social justice, Indigenous rights and environmental issues. In my work with the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS), I have deepened my interest in and understanding of current social issues in the ACT, especially mental health, housing and disability services.

As a candidate for Molonglo, I bring substantial experience in advocating for a fairer world, and a commitment to working in partnership with people to build a better Canberra. I want to build on the work of the ACT Greens to foster a dynamic and equitable community. I believe that the small size, educated population and relative wealth of Canberra should allow us to do better in terms of social justice and environmental sustainability—if we can't get it right here, then where?

I first met Charlie when he was a passionate campaigner for Community Aid Abroad, that dynamic people-to-people development organisation, which used to have an office in the Griffin Centre, and a wonderful community development approach both in its local awareness-raising work and with partner groups in poor countries. Being defunded by the national office as it turned itself into Oxfam CAA and breaking its tradition of grassroots organising through local groups forged a close community and certainly

helped cement the bonds between Charlie and his partner, Pam, who met through their work in CAA.

Later I met Charlie again as he worked with Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation. That famous sea of hands owes a lot to him. However, most Canberrans and other members of the Assembly will have met him in his work at ACTCOSS. Here is what Sandra Lilburn, the other deputy director there, had to say about Charlie:

Joining ACTCOSS in October 2001, Charlie Pahlman soon took on the role of Deputy Director (Sector Development) and in this position strengthened the capacity of the organisation to actively support community development in the ACT. Charlie established a distinctive profile as a community facilitator within the sector and worked tirelessly as an advocate for community determined action. His unflagging belief that each community should determine their own future was an inspiration to all who had the chance to work with Charlie. Through his work Charlie Pahlman was able to translate his belief into practice and provide many groups and community based organisations with the resources and skills they needed to set and achieve their future goals.

Through his leadership, the ACTCOSS Sector Development team has helped many organisations in the ACT to translate their passion and commitment into a clearly formulated organisational plan and map out a sustainable future. One of Charlie's greatest legacies can be seen in the numerous groups and community based projects that have reached their potential and thrived under his friendly guidance.

As Deputy Director at ACTCOSS, Charlie's commitment to the ACT community was demonstrated by his efforts to regenerate the Community Development Network ... his particular dedication to organisations in the mental health and HACC sectors, and his facilitation work for the Indigenous Housing Forum. His broader interests and activism served to extend his effectiveness in his work at ACTCOSS and gain him respect in the ACT community sector.

And then, in December 2003, we were both preselected to be the Greens lead candidates for Molonglo. If ever there was a case for the way Greens do politics differently, our 2004 election campaign was the exemplar. Politics is by its nature competitive—but Charlie and I worked as a team, putting collegiality and cooperation before politics. The process was as important as the outcome for both of us, dyed in the methods of community development as we both were. We acknowledged each other everywhere, we met weekly, then daily, we gave out each other's material, we rang each other up and we attended community meetings, car-pooling as friends do.

When I went into hospital with a sudden illness, Charlie sent me a huge bunch of flowers and rang to check on my progress. I grew so much through this campaign and I am a better member for having seen how Charlie's smile could light up the world and move people to seek the best outcomes.

Charlie's family and friends have set up a web site where people may read and add their tributes to Charlie's life. You will find it at www.charlie.pahlman.com. From the many tributes, I have taken one which describes the way Charlie worked, from someone who knew him well: as my closing word, it is Charlie's lesson for us all, because a life like his must not be allowed to end; it must continue in our work and our relationships with others.

Prue Borrmann, whom many of you will know, wrote this:

I first met Charlie when he started work at ACTCOSS. He came out to visit me at the Health Care Consumers Association office at the Pearce Community Centre and we talked about the health consumer movement and how he came to be working at ACTCOSS. He took time to understand where I was coming from and I found an instant ally. He embraced and challenged my ideas and we started to work together to broaden the involvement of health consumers in the community in a couple of areas through ACTCOSS, something I had wanted to do for some time.

I felt far less isolated as a sole worker in one of the many community organisations in the ACT and was very pleased to work with Charlie who picked up and worked with my enthusiasm. He had great respect for others.

That's what Charlie did so well, he saw the big picture, drew the threads together and then worked actively to create and build connections.

I valued his sharp intellect, the challenges, insight, warmth and vision, his inclusive approach to everything: in a nutshell his courage and leadership.

In between sadness and disbelief at Charlie's passing I have also had a very strong sense that Charlie is OK. That the strength of his spirit continues to connect with all that knew him. He connected and will continue to connect so that we work for a fairer, just and more loving world.

And so we do.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition): On behalf of the opposition, I extend our condolences and best wishes to Charlie's mother, Anna Lena, who is with us this afternoon, to his brother, Andrew, in particular to his partner, Pam, who is with us, and her mother, Marjory, and from his first marriage his wife, Christine, and in particular his children, Tina and Kari, and to all his friends and those who mourn Charlie's passing.

In many ways Charlie is somewhat the Australian story. He came here as a migrant at the age of 10 and in a few short years managed to cram in an education at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, went jackarooing and was an avocado farmer, a restaurateur, an aid worker, a deputy director at ACTCOSS and many other things.

When I got the phone call early on Saturday morning, it actually came from a member of the mental health community who had heard the rumour and asked if I could verify whether or not Charlie had died. After making a few phone calls, it was quickly apparent that he was dead. It was the number of people who wanted to know so quickly and who were so concerned about Charlie and about his family that really shows the sort of tentacles that a man like Charlie Pahlman had into his community: he was well and truly anchored here.

What can you say about the man? As has been said, he was a deputy director at ACTCOSS, he was a political candidate, a tremendous family man, a good bloke. I think a measure of the man is the way that he arranged his personal affairs. Charlie had been married to Christine. He had met Christine in Thailand, where they had married and had two daughters, Tina and Kari. But when that had not worked out, he remained close

friends with Christine. I know this through other relationships that I have with people who knew Charlie and his family. Even on the day he died, Charlie and Pam, Charlie's kids, Tina and Kari, Pam's daughters, Rebecca and Bella, Charlie's mother, Anna Lena, and Christine, were all there in Samoa. Not many of us are able to arrange our personal affairs in such a way and I think the way he worked at that, his personal life, is truly a reflection of the man.

If you want a reflection of how his community held him, you have only to visit the Charlie Pahlman Memorial web site. I am not aware of many web sites that are set up in people's honour when they die, but this is clearly one that has been well visited and well cared for. I would encourage members to visit the site themselves and read the various stories there. You can feel the genuine affection and love that his family and friends had for Charlie.

There is also a tribute to Charlie in the foyer at the ACTCOSS headquarters in Jamieson House up on Constitution Avenue—something I have not seen before. There is a small memorial in the form of a rug and on it there are some photos, some flowers, candles, cards and people's reflections. Again, that depth of emotion that people are willing to show for Charlie is a real tribute to the man he was. If you are passing ACTCOSS headquarters in Constitution Avenue, just duck in and pay your respects, because it is still there and I suspect it will be there for some time to come.

I ran into Charlie through his work in mental health, through his work as director of ACTCOSS and particularly out on the hustings. I think the way he behaved on the hustings was an example to all of us. He was always willing to have the argument, he was always willing to stand by his convictions and his belief, but was always willing to allow other people to have their say and then join with them in a conversation or a discussion on how his view was perhaps better or stronger and why we should change ours. I will always remember Charlie for being willing to have a go and never giving up. Certainly, his sharing and generosity come through in what other people have said about him, and I think ultimately what you can say about him is that he was a good bloke and a great Australian.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo): I would like to thank the Chief Minister for bringing forward this motion this morning. I rise to pay my sincere respects to a man I hardly knew but a man who made you feel like you had known each other for years. I acknowledge members of Charlie's family in the chamber there. Thank you for being here today.

I was just bowled over by this person who bowled people over; he just did that. He would bound into the room before election time at forums, sleeves rolled up, always rushing, hat down—sometimes hat on—ready to go: "Right, let's get into it."

I remember one particular occasion over at the ACROD election forum when Charlie was under attack from other candidates at that stage. He had got a few of these election forums up his sleeve and was getting used to the attacks of: "Ah, but where's the money going to come from?" He stood up this time and said, "Well, perhaps we may never hold the chequebook, but it won't stop me or the Greens from lobbying those that do" or words to that effect—and that was Charlie.

I indeed too was very touched by his web site. It is funny how in life people whom you hardly know can have this impact upon you, but evidence of that was what I can only call the celebration of life, joy, freedom and liberty in the memorial service that was held for Charlie. It was literally standing room only. I was just so taken aback. It was the depth of this human being that was able to permeate the lives of everybody and any organisation he worked for.

I also stand here today on behalf of Liberal colleagues for Molonglo Zed Seselja and Richard Mulcahy and indeed all other Liberal candidates for Molonglo who stood in the election. They would often comment: "Who is this Charlie? What an exceptional guy." As Dr Foskey has said, it was interesting that so many people thought Charlie's approach was such a refreshing one in life—so different. He would transcend the boundaries of politics. I had probably three or four really good discussions with Charlie. Immediately you could get the heart of the man, and that is really a credit to his parents, to his former wife and to his partner, Pam—to many people, too many to mention but they know who they are. I was just taken aback by the stunning daughters and the musical gifts that that family have. Keep on the music; that was great.

This was a man who would turn around in my life the phrase, "How are you going?" He really wanted to know; he really did care about how you were going. I know Dr Foskey wrote that, and it is on the web site. But it is so true. When I read that, I said, "Yes, that's right." Charlie would come into a room and it was eyeball to eyeball, "How are you going?" You could tell it was not just, "How are you going? See you later," as often many of us do. Charlie meant it. He wanted to know you. He wanted to know about you and your life.

This statement on his web site really epitomises him:

... I formed a deep commitment to supporting local peoples in their struggles to protect and sustain their livelihoods, cultures and natural resources.

That, from what I have heard, was the life of Charlie Pahlman. He was there. He wanted to be there for people. He had this deep commitment.

Charlie's death was tragic, but he had a passion for water, and I can relate to that. I am a water baby too. I read on the web site about Charlie paddling around and he was so happy. I think he died in a place where he was most at home, in the ocean. You can read for yourselves the words that are written on the web site about that.

I am sure that wherever he is now Charlie will be advocating a fairer world. Charlie was, in the short time I knew him, a person of sincerity of heart. There are not a lot of human beings that you can often say that about. I pay my sincere respects and offer my sincere condolences to his close family but know that Charlie has sown seeds of greatness into his children and that from that we will see Charlie Pahlman living well in our community. Charlie, you did permeate your whole being into everything you did. Charlie, your memory lives on. God bless you, my friend.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.