



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Adams, Senator Judith Anne**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 8 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Speaker** McKenzie, Sen Bridget

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**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria) (15:28): I also rise to support the condolence motion to recognise the passing of an extraordinary Australian woman, Senator Judith Adams. Today we are celebrating the life of a woman whom I wish I had had more time to get to know. She was only 68. She was special and she is irreplaceable. I would have liked to have attended her funeral service in WA, where Senator Nash represented the Nationals. At this time of sorrow, our hearts go out to those who love her, particularly her family: her sons, Stuart and Robert, and their respective partners, Anne and Tammy; and her grandchildren, Taylor and Maelle, who have a great role model in this grandmother of theirs. I will remember her with fondness, respect and great admiration. Many fine sentiments have been expressed about Senator Adams today and I am sure more will follow my brief contribution.

I have known Judith only since July 2011 but she made a significant impact on me. As a way of demonstrating that, I will tell you a little story. As part of the *Women in Federal Parliament* initiative, a permanent exhibition near the entrance on the first floor, each female parliamentarian submits a photo of themselves to display there. As a newly elected senator, I was sent the information and a sample of relaxed natural photos, which is what they were looking for, and asked could I provide one. They sent a range of the photos of other female senators. Everyone was looking relaxed and natural, some a little more than others and some had clearly just pulled a photo out of their electorate portfolio. Flicking through them as I sat at my little kitchen table in Leongatha in South Gippsland, probably in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, the picture I liked the best was of a woman riding on a quad bike with her working dogs beside her. Her clothes were farm wear and she was smiling straight down the barrel of the camera. The bike was moving—it was an action shot. It really appealed to me. I thought, 'If there are people like this woman in this place, I think I'm going to be okay.' There was a steely determination behind that smile of somebody who knows the reality of living on the land with and against the environment and the elements. I was impressed with the authenticity of this woman senator in the photo. She was proud of being a country woman. She was happy for that photo to go up on permanent display in the Australian parliament. I did not know her name. It was not until a

couple of months ago that I worked out that that woman was Senator Judith Adams.

Once I got here, I was appointed to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, where I met a lovely woman with beautiful suits, magnificent suits of such vibrant colours in a place where—let's face it—it is black or red, or grey if you are on the trend upward. She had fantastic and colourful suits. She was softly spoken and she had a fierce passion for regional Australia, particularly Western Australia. Obviously, as a National, that is a passion I share. She was also quietly furious about waste in spending. She was very concerned about Indigenous issues and she displayed an impressive and intricate knowledge of the health portfolio and which bureaucrat was which in Senate estimates processes.

Throughout all those hearings, I thought she was recovering; I did not know that she was so ill. She had asked me to assist with budget estimates—all she said was that she had been unable to organise it this time—and she gave me lots of gentle advice around the process. A meeting took place in her office. It was the first time I had been in her office but I remember it was just lovely—full of natural light and flowers. I really miss that, being inside so much these days. Her office really impressed me.

She was patient and kind at the same time as being strong and brave. The woman in the photo who so impressed me, the woman with a steely determination to fight injustice, was the same woman who tried to fight cancer—Judith Adams. I recently learnt that Judith had worked as a nursing sister in the New Zealand territorial army and, at the age of 23, during the Vietnam War she worked with the medical team other people have mentioned. That particular experience must have shaped her. It gave her the ability to deal with loss and to manage life, as it reveals itself, in a practical and matter of fact way. War in Vietnam would have influenced how she managed her own illness and dealt with her own loss. Judith chose to focus on her fierce and ferocious advocacy of rural Australia. She also chose to keep the focus on the government and keeping the bureaucracy accountable through estimates. She was always focused on the outcome and keen to find a bipartisan solution if one presented itself.

I did not know her for long but her contribution to the Senate, to the Standing Committee on Community Affairs and to my growing understanding of work here was significant. I shall miss her colour, her professionalism and her strength but most of all her reality checks in the middle of committee hearings. So very, very regional Australian—vale Judith.