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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1400)
[English]

GORDON BROWN

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the official opposition, the Conservative caucus, and indeed the whole House are in mourning. I am truly saddened to inform the House of the sudden passing of our dear friend and colleague, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Gord Brown, earlier this morning.

Before I begin, I want to convey our appreciation to the members of the Parliamentary Protective Service, who were the first on the scene and went above and beyond, doing everything they could to try to save Gord's life this morning. Mr. Speaker, please give them our most sincere thanks for all their efforts to save our friend.

To say that we are all shocked and saddened by his sudden passing would be an understatement.

[Translation]

We are all heartbroken at this unexpected loss.

[English]

While this is a loss most deeply felt by those of us on this side of the House who worked, campaigned, and fought alongside him for years, I know that Gord always held the respect of all members in the House, and his loss will be felt by everyone who had the honour of sitting with him, working with him, or debating with him here.

Gord and I were elected at the same time. We are the class of 2004, but like so many of us, his involvement in politics began far earlier, as a student and as a teenager. He was the quintessential happy warrior, starting out as a volunteer for our party, and a grassroots Conservative through and through. He was involved in so many aspects of the party, going back literally decades. He got his start in the youth association of the PC Party. He worked on leadership campaigns, at the municipal level, and at the provincial level as well.

Everyone in Conservative politics in Ontario knew Gord Brown and respected him. He was a dedicated representative for his constituents in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau

Lakes. Gord earned their trust again and again through consecutive elections.

In this Parliament, he held the role of chief opposition whip, an important responsibility in the early days of this Parliament. He was an eternal optimist who was always quick with a compliment or a supportive word. He was whip of our caucus right away after the last election, and I had the honour of serving with him as House leader.

As some may know, the House leader and the whip share the same suite of offices up on the fourth floor. I remember the day his staff bought him a bullwhip to commemorate his appointment to that position. He got such a kick out of that. I remember for the first few days of that session, I could often hear the crack of that bullwhip, and I was always worried he was going to hurt himself.

While he was whip, he made it a priority to get to know every member of our team, not just as a colleague but as a person too, because he recognized that the challenges this life can place on members can be very difficult, and he wanted to make sure that our caucus supported each other, not just on a professional level but on a human level as well.

● (1405)

[Translation]

He carried out that very difficult role with his characteristic professionalism and used his political know-how to get things done.

[English]

Much will be said about Gord's contributions to his community as a councillor, a member of the chamber of commerce, and so much more.

Today we are thinking about his family, about his wife, Claudine, and his two sons, Tristan and Chance. We grieve with them.

Last week we had an event that we really wanted Gord to be at. He turned down the initial invitation, so I asked my office to follow up to make sure that he knew how important it was that he be there. He called back and said, "Listen, I can't go. I made a commitment to the only person more important to me than this team." That was Claudine. He had made arrangements to have a date night with his wife and was not going to break that for anyone. We are glad he kept it.

Many in this House have served with him in many different capacities and on several different committees over the past 15 years. However, those who got to know him the most probably did so on the ice. He was the captain of our Conservative hockey team. Mr. Speaker, I know you even had the pleasure of playing with him. He had as much passion for that as he did for his professional work, because it really gave him an opportunity to get to know his colleagues on a more personal level and just enjoy some time together outside of the precinct.

I do not have the words to properly express how terribly this has struck our entire Conservative family.

I want to thank members of every party, and the people who have served with us in past Parliaments, for all the well wishes we have received.

[*Translation*]

Today, our thoughts and prayers are with his loved ones during this difficult time.

[*English*]

Gord brought his tremendous passion to everything he did. Most recently, he did tremendous work fighting for those who suffered from thalidomide in their life. He approached that file with sincerity, knowing there was a real human cost to the people afflicted. He was moved by their suffering, and he was moved to do something about it. It was inspiring for every member of our team to see him really throw himself into that project.

We know not the time or the place. We trust in God's limitless mercy and everlasting love. We trust that his memory will be a blessing to all of us here. May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace.

● (1410)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I stand in the House today to join my voice with others in paying tribute to our dear friend and colleague, Gord Brown. It is also with immense joy that I can share what a wonderful person Gord was in every imaginable way.

First and foremost, on behalf of the Liberal Party and Liberal members both current and past, I extend our deepest condolences to his wife Claudine and his two sons Chance and Tristan.

I first got to know Gord as members of the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group, in which we worked in common cause on Canada-U.S. issues for more than a decade.

If memory serves, our first IPG meeting together was the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers' Annual Conference in Prince Edward Island, when Gord accepted my offer to show him around the island. As everyone knows, while Gord was always willing to work with others across party lines, he was a true-blue Conservative through and through. Therefore, for Gord to hop in my red truck and do a couple of tours with me around the island was, to say the least, interesting, but a lot of fun. We repeated that experience years later when the Conservative Party held its national caucus meeting in Prince Edward Island. I did not mind driving up to the door of it in my red truck to pick up Gord Brown.

However, I will have to admit that no matter how hard I tried, Gord was not about to change his political stripes. Gord would often speak about his riding, always emphasizing the Thousand Islands and how he could look across his yard and see the United States. He took great pride in introducing a bill to change the name of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park of Canada to Thousand Islands National Park of Canada. The bill became law in 2013 because of his hard work.

Gord served as co-chair of the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group, and he worked tirelessly to make, sustain, and build relationships with our counterparts in the U.S. Congress. In fact, without question, he was one of our strongest ambassadors on U.S. issues, and not just within the IPG context. On more than one occasion, he travelled to Washington to play with the Republican representatives on their hockey team. Some say the Republican team referred to Gord as its "ringer", and he loved that, and the representatives loved to have him. We would hear, in the discussions when we would meet the Congressional representatives in the U.S., about a number of them, but especially Gord, who played for their hockey team.

Without a doubt, Gord loved hockey, and his son's hockey abilities were an endless source of pride for him. Often he would pull out his phone and show us pictures and videos of Tristan, at a very young age, in full hockey gear, racing up the ice. I imagine many in the House have seen those videos. Gord showed much pride in his family.

In this place and on trips to the United States, Gord was always respectful of everyone and thoughtfully considered the viewpoints of others, even though he might not agree. That was the tenor of the man.

Gord set goals and priorities and set out to achieve them in his political life. However, he was always clear about the importance of family and friends. For him, they always came first.

He will be deeply missed by everyone who had the good fortune to meet him.

Our condolences, again, to his family.

● (1415)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many, I stand here in shock and disbelief on the loss of one of our colleagues, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, our friend, Gord Brown.

To Claudine, Tristan, and Chance, the New Democrats offer our prayers, condolences, and thanks for sharing him with this Parliament and with our country of Canada.

I offer these remarks with both humility and pride: humility for a member who represented his constituents first and foremost; and pride on getting to know Gord in a professional and personal way that led to us becoming friends.

Gord had firm beliefs, but he was not ideological. That served him well in his various roles in Parliament, as an MP, as a member of a committee, as whip, and his numerous parliamentary associations. I knew him best in his role as vice-chair and co-chair of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, a role he loved and cherished.

In this capacity, Gord had the ability to be effective for Canada in a statesman way that should not be underestimated. He included all members, and when lobbying Congress and senators in Washington, he quickly gained respect and admiration from Democrats and Republicans both. Nothing could bond a New Democrat and a Conservative more than standing outside the White House for Canada.

We know Gord was an avid sports fan. In fact, I witnessed this first-hand when the NDP hockey team faced-off against the Conservative team. In this one-sided affair, Gord contributed to that victory. As the NDP goalie, I am blaming it on ownership. In fact, our team would soon be disbanded. However, never a moment passed in this hallway where Gord and I did not share discussions on coaching, our sons playing, his nephew, and others in his family.

That openness was one of the things that was rooted in him as a member of Parliament and in his work. It is probably one of the most serious contributions one can make. We simply knew what Gord was driving at every single time, and it was always for the people he represented and for Parliament. For that, I am always grateful.

When one lives on the border, one gets to become a fierce patriot, and Gord was that. For his passion of tourism, the environment, and our Canada, we will always be grateful.

I say goodbye to my border brother. You will never be forgotten. Again, I thank the family, friends, and community for sharing and ensuring Gord had the opportunity to make Canada a better place.

God bless Gord.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, news of the passing of our colleague, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Gord Brown, came as a shock to us all.

On behalf of myself and my Groupe parlementaire québécois colleagues, I extend my condolences to his wife and children, his loved ones and friends, his constituents, and his Conservative colleagues.

In politics, our question period confrontations attract more attention than our collaborative efforts. Still, we are all in the same boat: we are all here because we answered the call to serve the public, and it was while serving the public that Gord left us.

I would like to thank him for giving his all to representing the people of his riding for 14 years.

May his wife and children find the serenity and the courage to make it through this tragic time.

My sincere condolences.

• (1420)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to address the House.

As House leader for the Bloc Québécois, I offer my deepest and most sincere condolences on behalf of our leader, Martine Ouellet, and on behalf of my colleagues and members of the Bloc Québécois to the family of Gordon Brown, his friends, and all of his colleagues in the House of Commons, in particular his colleagues in the Conservative Party of Canada.

In difficult times like these, we are reminded of how fragile human life is, as we all have to face our mortality. Our colleague left us too soon. His death touches me as a member of Parliament and also as a human being, knowing that he would not have had the chance to say goodbye to his loved ones.

I want to recognize the commitment, selflessness, and courage of a man who dedicated his life to the well-being of his constituents.

Today, we all owe him our profound respect and deepest gratitude. My thoughts and prayers are with him and his loved ones. May he rest in peace and may his family find solace.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we all wish we were not rising on a sombre day to share memories of such a good guy. The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes has left us far too soon, at 57. It is for all of us a deep shock. We heard the news just hours ago. It is hard to rise in this place and speak of Gord Brown in the past tense.

I am really grateful that over the last seven years as a member of Parliament, I got to know Gord. He was a fine guy, a good person of good spirit, collegial, friendly. Yes, as my good friend from Malpeque said, he was a true-blue Conservative, but he was not so partisan that we could not be friends. He was fair-minded. As chair of the Standing committee on Canadian Heritage, he would give someone who was not on the committee a chance to speak.

For Claudine, Chance, and Tristan, we cannot begin to imagine the pain and grief you are experiencing. If through our words here today we can give you any comfort that we mourn his loss, that gives us some consolation, because your loss is so great.

It is often the case that when someone passes, there is a tendency to remember only the good things about that person, to accentuate the virtues and forget those things that were unpleasant. It is called hagiography. We embellish someone's memory. I just hope from the words spoken by all members of Parliament from different parties that every Canadian will know that we are not exaggerating virtues. We are not eliminating faults. I do not think there is a single person in this place who knew Gord who would have a bad word to say about him. In politics, I do not think there is any greater tribute to a human being than to be universally well liked and loved by colleagues in this place.

God bless you, Gord. We will miss you. May we do more as colleagues in this place to treat each other with the kindness with which Gord treated everyone.

• (1425)

The Speaker: Well said by all.

Today we have lost a beloved member of our parliamentary family. Gord Brown was a great friend, a valued colleague, a loving husband and father, and that most precious of creations, a good person.

He was a tenacious competitor, as we have heard, whether in the political arena or on the ice. I knew that. I saw it both on his team and opposite, and yet in all things, he was always and entirely a gentleman.

[*Translation*]

In tribute to him, I ask all members to rise and observe a moment of silence.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

[*English*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Portage—Lisgar:

That the House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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