



Speech by

**Rachel Nolan**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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## **DEATH OF MS H. BONNER**

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (7.34 p.m.): Heather Bonner, who passed away in Ipswich on 21 October, was a woman who lived her life completely in her power. Famous as an activist for Aboriginal rights and wife of Australia's first Aboriginal Senator, Neville Bonner, Heather lived her life with power and with grace.

Heather was born into a political family in Ipswich in 1923, her grandfather having been the federal member for Moreton before her birth. She attended Silkstone State School and, like me, Ipswich Girls Grammar. As a corporal in the AWAS in the Second World War, she worked as confidential secretary to an Australian military general. During the war she married an American soldier and moved to the US as a war bride. When her first child was young Heather's husband died and, after some years, she remarried, having two more children with her second American husband. The second marriage became extremely turbulent and Heather, a beautiful woman of tremendous strength and style, ran away back to Ipswich with her three young children.

Heather was a woman of strong Christian faith and a passionate advocate for what she believed to be right. She sometimes said that she did not care what someone's politics or religion were as long as they had some. She became an organiser and speaker in the campaign against communism and later—we do not really know what prompted her—she became actively involved in the One People of Australia League, an organisation which brought white and Aboriginal Australians together in the fight for Aboriginal justice. OPAL was central in the campaign to grant Aboriginal people the right to vote, a campaign which was won in 1967. Through OPAL Heather met and married Neville Bonner and her political skills were instrumental in his rise through the Liberal Party to the point where he was elected a Senator from 1971 to 1983.

But Heather Bonner was by no means just standing by her man. She is a woman remembered for her brains, her strength, her style and her power. The Bonner household was a place of successful political activism, but it was also a place which brought people together and from which friends and extended family—both black and white—would come and go seeking warmth and inspiration.

Heather and Neville Bonner represented all that was right about the international fight for civil rights from the 1950s to the 1990s. Heather's funeral was attended by white people and Aboriginal people of all generations who were touched by her spirit and her strength. Her passing is a great loss to Ipswich, but Heather Bonner remains an inspiration to people who believe passionate individuals can change the world for the better.