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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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TIM FISCHER

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Can I add my words to those of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party: Michael, you've done your friend and mentor proud.

All of us who come to this place do so with our own sense of purpose about what it is to be a parliamentarian—a good local member, a player in a party team, a patriot in the service of our nation. But to be a representative in the truest sense of the word, in this House of Representatives, is actually an ideal which is hard to realise. Do we really think the same way as those who put us here? Do we understand their needs? Do we look like them? Do we bring to bear in this place their sensibilities as they would want them expressed?

In this context, I don't think that there has ever been a better representative of the community from which he came than Tim Fischer—everything about him: the way he spoke, his iconic hat, his love of trains, his no-nonsense, practical way of viewing the world.

Tim was the very embodiment of rural Australia.

But there was one part of Tim which to describe as typical rather undersells him, although it is an aspect of his being to which we would all aspire. Because Tim's integrity—his sense of honour, his honesty, his deep sense of decency—was special and it was rare.

In that sense, he was not just an example of the electorate of Farrer; he was the very best that that community—indeed, our nation—had to offer. As a result, his community loved him, as did his country, in a way which completely transcended partisan politics.

But Tim also understood that to be a representative is not just about reflecting the attitudes of your community at any moment in time. Because he understood the role of leadership—leading your community, leading your country to a better place, even if that is a place which, at the beginning, your community can't quite see.

It was in that spirit that Tim's advocacy for gun law reform, in the aftermath of the Port Arthur massacre, was truly inspirational. It places him right at the centre of one of the most important legacies of the Howard Government.

In our own age, of a pre-eminent, loud, self-reinforcing social media, which sometimes seems to encourage populism, his making of that argument is an example to all of us here about how to do our job at the highest level and in the best possible way.

Tim was famously a Vietnam veteran and he was a tireless advocate for Vietnam vets. But his own story of service is a remarkable one. He was a conscript, but he would say of that moment that it was a moment of good fortune, because, to be frank, it opened up a whole new world to him.

In his tour of Vietnam he fought in the battle of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, and he was wounded there. This battle was one of the bloodiest, severest and fiercest, certainly one of the most iconic, engagements that Australian service personnel have engaged in, really, since the Second World

War. The battalion of which Tim was a part, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, 1RAR, received a citation of gallantry from the United States—a rare honour indeed. Perhaps it was having this experience early on in his life which gave him a sense of the preciousness of life, of the need to be purposeful and of the true meaning of service and of sacrifice.

In 2008, the Rudd Labor Government appointed Tim to be Australia's ambassador to the Holy See, a position he took up the following year and one he held for the ensuing three years. It was in his role as a diplomat that I got to meet Tim just a little. I can tell you that Tim was a gifted diplomat. If Tim Fischer decided he was going to like you, then you had absolutely no chance.

I particularly remember Tim's work in Australia's campaign to become elected to the UN Security Council in 2012. His contribution was priceless. As just one example, the people of Bhutan absolutely loved Tim Fischer. And even though it was the Gillard Labor Government, no decision, no act, no word given by that Government to the people of Bhutan meant anything unless it came via Tim Fischer.

In Bhutan, they don't measure development by wealth or prosperity. Instead, they have a happiness index. They see the pursuit of happiness as the meaning of life. When I imagine the smiling, optimistic face of Tim Fischer, I am sure that this is an idea which would have resonated completely with him and which would have so beautifully captured his spirit.

Our thoughts today are with Judy and all the Fischer family.

Vale, Tim Fischer.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.