

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, ESTABLISHMENT

588. Mr C.J. BARNETT to the Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth:

I refer the minister to her media release today in which she claimed that the coalition had not properly consulted with the community before introducing its legislation to establish a Commission for Children, and I ask -

- (1) Is the minister aware that this legislation was drafted after a children's summit in 2002, attended by 300 people and featuring guest speakers and panellists including the New Zealand Commissioner for Children, Professor Fiona Stanley and Hon David Malcolm, the Chief Justice of Western Australia?
- (2) Is the minister aware that this legislation was drafted after the release in late 2002 of, and public comment on, an opposition position statement on this issue?
- (3) Is the minister aware that this legislation was drafted after the report of a select committee in the Legislative Council which undertook extensive consultation with witnesses and the receipt of written submissions from individuals and organisations?
- (4) Is the minister aware that the Gordon inquiry also recommended the establishment of a Commission for Children?
- (5) Will the minister admit that she is wrong in her claims and is simply embarrassed by her own lack of action and progress on this issue?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

- (1)-(5) I think the member's own question illustrates how unclear the drafting of this piece of legislation is. He cited three different occasions on which it was drafted and that affirms my comments that it was drafted as a political stunt, and nothing more.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms S.M. McHALE: In contrast to the way this member has arrogantly - and that is the word I used in my press release - introduced this piece of legislation, we are tailoring a piece of legislation that will match the needs of Western Australia. We are not borrowing a model from New Zealand or Tasmania. We are tailoring a piece of legislation that will match the needs of Western Australia and, importantly, the children of Western Australia. I will give members of the Opposition an example of how we are approaching this in a very considered way. We are not rushing it. We are embarking right now, today and over the next few weeks on consultation with children -

Mr C.J. Barnett: After three years you are going to consult! You are useless.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the members for Warren-Blackwood and Nedlands to order for the first time.

Ms S.M. McHALE: The Leader of the Opposition talks about the consultation that took place at the children's summit. How many children were there? Zero. We are consulting with people to get a Western Australian model. I will respond to one thing: we have always said that a children's commission was part of the Labor Party policy, but we were not -

Mr C.J. Barnett: You opposed it publicly.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms S.M. McHALE: Members opposite do not like the truth, because the Leader of the Opposition has made a political stunt -

Mr C.J. Barnett: What a disgrace!

Ms S.M. McHALE: We were prepared to put money into frontline services and staff to protect children. We were not going to set up a bureaucracy before we dealt with the pressing needs for children. I will stand by that position. I will give an example of the sort of thing that could happen if the member for Cottesloe's legislation were introduced: a children's commission was established in British Columbia, but it was disbanded some time later after a review found it duplicated other functions in an inefficient arrangement. We want a system that matches Western Australian needs and does not duplicate other functions and organisations, and it will be implemented through a good piece of legislation.