

FEDERAL ELECTION — MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [5.32 pm]: In this term, I have tried to establish a practice of making a member's statement only when I consider them to be strictly necessary. We understand that members' statements provide an opportunity for some latitude for private members—particularly government private members who do not sit on the front bench—to make contributions to this house in a way that is consistent with their conscience and their calling, but in a manner in which the ordinary proceedings perhaps might not allow. That said, I think there is always a need to exercise that opportunity with some judgement and some discretion. Invariably and quite obviously, we are experiencing heightened political times in the lead-up to the federal election on 21 May. We are obviously in a more heightened environment by virtue of the fact that we are in the pre-polling phase. If I understand correctly, the Australian Electoral Commission reported that one million people—at least until the closing of the polls yesterday—had exercised that choice. I will make the observation that in the exchange of views and in the debate in this house in the last three days, there have been a number of occasions on which reference has been made to that very obvious fact. I would draw the conclusion—I think I am in a sound position to do that—that government members, as is their right, have used the opportunity to campaign for the election of an Albanese federal government through the mechanisms that this chamber permits. I thought that there was a fine example—not a fine example; an example—of that yesterday in the motion brought to the house by Hon Dan Caddy.

However, the contribution given this evening by Hon Klara Andric is not in keeping with her obvious talent. It is not in keeping with her capacity to undertake independent research that is to the benefit of elevating debate in this chamber and is in the service of the people of Western Australia. The federal Liberal candidate to whom she referred is not a person I know at all well. I have met Kristy McSweeney, the candidate for the federal electorate of Swan, on maybe one or two occasions. The Swan campaign is a mystery to me. I am geographically dislocated from the realities of southern seats campaigning, as members would understand. However, I would just say, as a cautionary note: do not use members' statements as an opportunity to make hit-and-run ambushes on political opponents. Once members start to establish a reputation as someone who is wont to do that, they invite a lot of reciprocity, and a focus and categorisation of themselves as a member. Frankly speaking, I do not think that is the reputation that the honourable member wants to establish so early into her parliamentary career, and I hope it is a long, meaningful and productive one.

I would be very, very cautious about speaking about the previous professional callings of federal election candidates, because that will also invite scrutiny and contemplation of the post-political careers of a number of former federal members. Need I reflect on Hon Stephen Conroy, who is now a lobbyist for big gambling. If big tobacco is a sin, I cannot see how in the Labor movement big gambling is not an equally obnoxious sin.

Frankly, the member should use the opportunity to double-check this evening whether what she has read into the record tonight would stand external scrutiny. I hope not to have to bear witness again to these obnoxious character abuses and ambushes in this chamber, because I consider that to be an abuse of this privilege.