

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2020

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [6.25 pm]: Very briefly, when I came into parliamentary service, I was counselled by more experienced people than me to the effect that so much of the value and the good work in this place is done behind the Chair or in committee, essentially based on principles of trust, adult conduct and professionalism. I want to reflect on a couple of experiences that I have had in the course of the last 24 hours which simultaneously prove and disprove that theory.

The first is a compliment that I wish to pay to the staff in the office of the Minister for Health, Roger Cook, and in particular, Mr Neil Fergus. Last evening, I think he went above and beyond to assist me to deal with a very sensitive medical issue that affected a constituent of mine and, more than that, someone very close to me personally. Mr Fergus's conduct was exemplary. He is a credit to his office and I think he reflects well on his minister. I told the minister today that I would thank him on the record in *Hansard* and I feel as though I should carry through on that obligation. I am withholding the details because nobody else needs to know them.

Also within the course of the last 24 hours, as I alluded to earlier, I have had my hope of trust, professionalism and sheer adult conduct disproved or disabused by the conduct today of the Minister for Planning. I will not reflect on the course of debate in that chamber, but let me say this: the minister has my phone number. If she wants to speak to me about any matter, as it relates to her portfolio or a tranche of legislation that she believes is significant and would benefit from opposition knowledge and support, she should act like an adult. Unfortunately, it appears to me that the minister, up until this point, is incapable of doing that.

In the short time available, I want to outline a process that I believe is embarrassing, unprofessional and haphazard. It relates to a bill that was introduced today called the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2020. The opposition was briefed—or was attempted to be briefed—on this bill at five o'clock last night. The briefing was conducted by professional public servants and two advisers from the minister's office. I take them to be capable, professional people. I do not reflect on them or their capacity. One of those individuals is a senior public servant, Gail McGowan, whom I have the utmost regard and respect for. However, these people were placed in a position of briefing the opposition on a piece of legislation without the bill to refer to. There was then the expectation that that bill would be waved through the other place today without any scrutiny. That is not how we conduct ourselves. That is absolutely appalling. Today, the minister placed her public servants and staff in an invidious position and then went on to make claims that I have somehow impugned their characters. I impugned nobody's character, but I reserve the right to criticise conduct, and if I see conduct that is unbecoming—standards of behaviour that fail to meet the bare minimum of any decent threshold—I will call it out.

I will end on this. It is often the way that we tell children to observe the golden rule in life: treat others as you would have yourself be treated. There is an obverse rule, the silver rule, which goes like this: treat others the way they wish to be treated. The Minister for Planning might want to reflect on which rule she wants to abide by if she wants this bill to proceed in an orderly way.