

MINISTER FOR HEALTH, POSITION ON DRUGS

**540. Mr M.J. BIRNEY to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to the evidence he provided on 7 October 1997 to the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981 when he was a senior member of the Western Australian Police Service. In that evidence he stated -

... the term harm minimisation has become synonymous with drugs being good ... That is absolute bullshit. They destroy people.

How does the minister reconcile his former position on drugs as a senior Western Australian police officer with his new position on drugs as a Labor cabinet minister, when that new position involves the decriminalisation of cannabis?

The SPEAKER: Once again, although the question has been framed in a certain way, I am not sure whether it falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Health.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Absolutely.

The SPEAKER: I was not asking a question; I was stating what I thought. As far as the question does fall within the minister's portfolio, I ask him to answer the question. However, he does not need to answer those parts of the question that fall outside his portfolio.

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

That evidence was given in the context of dealing with harm minimisation generally. At one stage the concept of harm minimisation was pushed in this State as the only answer, in the same way that getting kids to say no to drugs was the only answer. Neither of those answers was correct, except for those people for whom they worked.

There is a broad range of issues. I was very proud to be part of the group that sat here and listened to true democracy in action.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Those people were not elected!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: As I have said on a number of occasions, I spoke to people -

Mr C.J. Barnett: They were Labor appointees.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I spoke to a number of people selected to attend that summit who represented both those points of view. Some people at that Drug Summit represented the Young Liberal movement, and others represented the very extreme end of the harm minimisation debate in which it is considered good to do everything. For the first time in the history of the drug debate in this State, the margins came in. I was very pleased to see that, and people like Hon Fred Chaney also commented on it. At the end of the day we saw the emergence of some very clear directions to give to the parents, families and children of this State.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Drugs for kids. Backyard production.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I say to any person in this House who has children: as those children grow up and become teenagers, there but for the grace of God go I. We have come up with a very balanced, sensible way of addressing the vexing issue of cannabis use. All the abuse and entrenched prejudices and views of opposition members and all the sticking of heads in the sand will not move away from the fact that at long last we have a community that is prepared to look after its children and produce proper, sensible ways of dealing with this issue.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Moore and Leader of the Opposition!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We will have that debate in this House, and we will again see from the other side all the dogmatism and prejudices I have seen since I first came to this place.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Sticking up for children is not prejudice.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We have answered that question. We will continue to answer that question in debate.

I make a further comment while I am on my feet as I may not get another opportunity. All this week I have been visiting primary schools in my electorate as part of Harmony Week. I congratulate the member for Murdoch for starting the Harmony Week projects. I am pleased that initiative has been taken up across this great nation.

When I made that presentation to the select committee, the member for Murdoch did not have his head in the sand. He knew full well the implications of the drug issues in this State. I hope that in the coming debate he will not put his head in the sand. As I spoke to the children I realised that this is a sensible way of doing things. Yesterday morning I found it ironic that in a year 1 class I spoke to was a young fellow whose father is a member of our serving forces and a girl who is the daughter of a refugee and has a grandmother in Baghdad. Today is a very sad day for this country and the world. Those two children will play together this afternoon, and one of their family members might not be here tomorrow. It is a sad day.

We will approach this debate in the same way - without emotion and by making sure we get a practical and sensible solution for the young people of this State.