

CANNABIS, DECRIMINALISATION

961. Mr JOHNSON to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to his statement on a Channel Seven program yesterday in which he said that he will not decriminalise cannabis in this State - not under this Government.

- (1) Will the minister guarantee that the cultivation of two plants or fewer of cannabis will continue to result in a criminal penalty and not a fine under this Government?
- (2) Will the minister guarantee that possession of cannabis outside the scope of the coalition Government's cautioning system will continue to attract a criminal penalty and not a fine under this Government?
- (3) If not, is it not true that this Government in fact is effectively decriminalising cannabis?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) I will say in full context what I said yesterday. Had members of the Opposition been at the excellent conference that is being attended currently by almost 400 people from all over the world, they would have heard the views that are being expressed by the experts. They also would have read the comments in the newspaper by the Canadian expert in which he says that the directions that Australia is taking in terms of the scourge of the twenty-first century probably lead the way. I repeat what I said yesterday at the conference: we will not legalise cannabis. We have not yet released the Pryor report. We have made it quite clear in this House -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kalgoorlie!

Mr KUCERA: Those people who were present in this House during the Community Drug Summit will know clearly the emphasis that this Government has put on the 45 recommendations that arose from the summit. Yet again, the Opposition -

Several members interjected.

Mr KUCERA: It is a wonder that we can hear any noise about change when members opposite continually put their heads in the sand. Yesterday at that conference, a continuous stream of people said that nowadays Governments need to have some courage and need to start to work together to change issues in this area. I will highlight something very quickly.

Mr Johnson: You are not answering the question.

Mr KUCERA: I am answering the question. In answer to the last two parts of the question -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr KUCERA: I will relate something that has happened in the past week. In 1994, the previous Government introduced a very good policy in response to the explosion of HIV-AIDS in this State by introducing needle exchange. We can talk about moving backwards and sticking our heads in the sand.

Mr Johnson: You cannot answer the question, can you?

Mr KUCERA: I will quote what was reported in *The West Australian* of 3 May about the views of the opposition spokesperson in another place on drugs in this State. He is reported as saying -

"I am appalled that so much effort is given to facilitating people's drug abuse -

This is on needle exchange -

not only in this, but in a wide range of other programs," -

Point of Order

Mr JOHNSON: This question is specifically about cannabis; growing cannabis plants and its decriminalisation. It has nothing to do with needle exchange. This answer is in no way relevant to the question that has been asked. Obviously, the minister does not want to answer the question as he knows it will embarrass him. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to make his answer relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER: The question is clearly about drug reform and the minister can answer so long as he does so in relation to that issue.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr KUCERA: I will be very quick and brief because I am highlighting people's views of terminology that is used in this case.

Mr Birney interjected.

Mr KUCERA: I am very pleased that the member for Kalgoorlie has raised his voice again. Obviously, his head has come out of the sand. The member for Kalgoorlie is quoted in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* today as saying -

the program's health benefits outweighed any ethical question . . . However, the main reason for governments getting involved in the hand-out of syringes is to stop the spread of HIV and people sharing needles . . .

I have consistently said in this House that we will not be legalising cannabis. We will release a report.