

ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE, GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO REPLACE AIRCRAFT

844. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, an organisation that is an icon in Western Australia, and one of which I am sure all members in the House are proud. This question is not a criticism, but is meant to raise the issues. The minister would be aware that, for the first time, the Royal Flying Doctor Service has taken out a \$15 million loan for the replacement of aircraft and as a result, must find ways of repaying that loan from its fundraising and recurrent expenditure. Is the Government considering assisting the service with some payment of that loan, and looking at an ongoing program of replacement aircraft?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for the question, which is probably a little premature, because the Government has not yet had an official approach on this matter from the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

While I am on my feet, I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of the head boys and girls from the Carmel School and the Mt Lawley Senior High School. I had lunch with the four of them today, along with their principals; this State's future is in great hands.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: We should hire one of them to do your job.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Our teenagers are wonderful people. Their only problem is that they tend to turn into people like the member for Hillarys.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Only a very small percentage of them.

Mr E.S. Ripper: He was never a teenager!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Now, now - he was not born like that; he grew up that way! The redeeming factor, as just pointed out by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, is that only a very small percentage of teenagers will turn out like the member for Hillarys.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure was wearing her school uniform yesterday!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: And she looked very nice in it!

I thank the member for Murdoch for raising this issue, but it is probably premature. In the last financial year the State Government contributed \$11.5 million to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and the allocation for the forthcoming financial year is still to be confirmed. Discussions are taking place in the department about that matter. Quite rightly, as the member for Murdoch pointed out, that \$11.5 million is for recurrent costs for the service. It receives funding from two other sources - the Commonwealth Government and the broader community. I make a plea for that community to continue its support for this great organisation. We have been regularly consulting with the RFDS about the contract. I recall christening a couple of the service's new aeroplanes earlier this year at the Jandakot airfield. At that stage the service had raised a loan to pay for the planes. There was no suggestion at that stage that it would be approaching the Government for payment of that debt. Some suggestions have certainly been made to me about the replacement of planes in the north west, but at this stage no formal approach has been made. As with all things in health, such as the renewal of our hospitals and the funding of extra nurses, each as it comes up will be considered in due course.