

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SENIOR APPOINTMENTS

491. Mrs EDWARDES to the Minister for Education:

I refer the minister to an article in the *Sunday Times*, dated 4 November 2001. It relates to the Acting Deputy Director General of Education in Western Australia. The article states -

It has been alleged that Mr Harken, a former president of the State School Teachers' Union, has given jobs to friends he has worked with in the past, and to people who have links to the union . . .

Is the minister aware -

- (1) That the Acting Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, Kevin O'Keefe, was previously a country high school principal, and has been promoted three levels to his current senior position;
- (2) that at the time of his appointment, Mr O'Keefe was on the executive of the State School Teachers Union; and
- (3) that Mr Harken leapfrogged four levels to his current position?

Mr CARPENTER replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)-(3) I read the article in the *Sunday Times* with some interest. I am also aware that this issue has been raised in another place and various other forums. I am unaware that it is a crime to have been a member of the teachers union at any stage. The article also pointed out that, as the minister, I played no part in either Ed Harken or Kevin O'Keefe taking their current positions. That question was put directly to the now Acting Director General of Education, Mr Ron Mance, in the other place during the estimates hearings. Mr Mance pointed out that it was his decision. I invite the member to read *Hansard* on that matter.

I tried to find the reference point in a document that shows that Mr O'Keefe, who was the principal of the Mt Barker Senior High School, was recommended for the role that he now plays by Mrs May O'Brien who is the chairperson of the Aboriginal Education Advisory Council. The member for Stirling, who sits in this Chamber and is from the member for Kingsley's side of politics, gave me the highest possible recommendation for Kevin O'Keefe. Mr House said that Mr O'Keefe was an outstanding educator. I have no reason to doubt that Mr O'Keefe is an outstanding educator. Last year or the year before, he won the award - perhaps this issue has sparked some resentment by Mr O'Keefe's opponents - for outstanding Aboriginal educator in Western Australia. He is an outstanding educator. It was about nine or 10 years ago when Ed Harken was the President of the State School Teachers Union of WA. What is the point that the member is making? False assertions were made about my relationship with the previous Director General of Education, Mr Peter Browne, who was also an active member of the teachers union during his career. I fail to see why membership of the teachers union should be held against people in their progress through the department. If the direct assertion from other people, via the member for Kingsley, is that Mr Harken and Mr O'Keefe are in the positions they enjoy because I put them there, the answer is that they are not there for that reason. They were appointed to that position by the now Acting Director General, Mr Mance.