

FORMER MINISTER FOR HEALTH, ALLEGATIONS BY MS JEAN THORNTON

894. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to his comments on Radio 6PR that due process must be followed in the handling by his office of the letter of 1 May to him from Department of Health whistleblower Jean Thornton.

- (1) Does the Premier consider that his office followed due process by referring the letter back to the Department of Health, given that the letter made serious allegations of bullying and threatening by the former Minister for Health and senior Department of Health bureaucrats?
- (2) Does the Premier concede that he is responsible for the performance of his ministers and that, as such, he was the correct person to receive complaints about the behaviour of the former Minister for Health, as contained in the letter?
- (3) If yes to (2), does the Premier also concede that he had a responsibility to properly investigate the complaints about the minister's allegedly threatening behaviour and that, in failing to do so, he has failed in his responsibility?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(3) I note that the member quoted from an interview on Radio 6PR when I specifically referred to the way in which complaints about staffing and employment matters in government departments should be dealt with. I made it very clear on the radio that Western Australia has a Public Sector Management Act, debate in which I participated when it went through the Parliament, which makes it absolutely clear that there is a line between the role of the minister on one side and the chief executive on the other side. I explained on the radio program the nature of that distinction and how important it was for proper process in Western Australia. Therefore, the context of those comments was clearly about the need to follow due process in dealing with complaints about staffing and managerial matters in government.

The meeting between the former Minister for Health and the union, at which Ms Jean Thornton was also present, was held in October 2002. I received the letter in May 2003. The union has not complained to me in any way, shape or form about the behaviour of the former Minister for Health. I spoke to him about this matter. He indicated that it was a willing discussion, but in no way, shape or form did he intend to harass or intimidate Ms Thornton. I do not question Ms Thornton's feelings about that meeting in any way, Mr Speaker, but I am confident about the former Minister for Health in this matter.