

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - STAFF

616. Mr R.C. KUCERA to the Minister for Community Development:

Like the Premier, I too would like to acknowledge the workers from the Department for Community Development who are in the gallery today. Unlike the majority of members in this house, I have worked alongside those people for many years.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I acknowledge the number of lives they have saved. On that note, I ask: can the minister please advise the house of his response to the opposition's claim that the DCD workers are to blame for the deaths of children in Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

I thank the member for Yokine for his question. I will keep my answer brief, because the Premier has already highlighted the ineptness of the comments made by members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the member for Roe.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the past week, members opposite have stooped to new lows. As I said to the rally of DCD workers today, we need to put aside the politics and the attacks that this opposition is continually firing at the workers in DCD, and ensure that the Department for Community Development is resourced appropriately and has the workers on the ground to do the important work that it needs to do. What opposition members have been saying in this place over the past few weeks has been disgraceful. In a media statement dated 14 August, the opposition spokesperson in the other place, Hon Robyn McSweeney, implied that DCD was responsible for the deaths of all the children whom it had had contact with. She said in that media statement that more than half the number of Western Australian children who died between July 2003 and June 2005 had had some form of contact with the Department for Community Development before their deaths. In a media statement dated 29 August, the Leader of the Opposition said that only a royal commission had the far-reaching powers to investigate and report without fear or favour on the actions of the Department for Community Development and others who had some responsibility for the deaths of the 159 children who had had contact with the department.

It is clear that members opposite are embarrassed by the comments they have made over the past few weeks.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the member for Capel.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They are absolutely abhorrent comments, directed at good people who are trying to do a good job with the resources they have. Members opposite are also embarrassed about their record. Their record in child protection when they were last in government was abysmal. That has been made very clear from statistics that have been quoted in this place over the past month or so. It is time for the Leader of the Opposition and other members on his side to apologise to the DCD workers and support them in the difficult job they are doing, so that they can continue to do quality child protection work in this state.