

COMPETITION POLICY PAYMENTS, POTENTIAL CUTS

1185. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Treasurer:

Will the Treasurer inform the House of the implications to Western Australians of potential cuts in competition payments to Western Australia?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

Yesterday I confirmed the very serious threat of the Commonwealth Government holding back competition policy payments to Western Australia. Essentially, the National Competition Council and the federal Treasurer are holding a dagger to the heart of Western Australia and Western Australians. If Peter Costello were to cut our payments, he might think that this would punish the State - and it certainly would - but, more importantly, he would also punish Western Australians. If the National Competition Council recommendations are upheld, it will have an impact on the ability of this and future Governments to provide funding for schools, hospitals and the Police Service in Western Australia. For example, substantial cuts could mean the difference between building and not building dozens and dozens of new primary and high schools in the next few years. As I have always said, this is a very serious issue. However, it has not been taken seriously by the Opposition. It appeared that yesterday the gravity of the issue suddenly dawned on the Leader of the Opposition. On Channel Nine last night he said, according to the transcript by the government media monitoring unit, with regard to me -

He should not have included that full competition payment in his budget.

In other words, he now thinks that it is a significant problem. Contrast that with the view that the Leader of the Opposition expressed when he spoke to Paul Murray on Radio 6PR on 25 June this year at the height of the debate on national competition policy and reform. Paul Murray asked -

... are we going to face being punished extensively all the way along the line?

The Leader of the Opposition replied -

No, I don't believe so, and I think if Western Australia, in those areas, decides -

Several members interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Members opposite do not want me to quote the Leader of the Opposition. They do not want to hear the Leader of the Opposition's words on 25 June. They are embarrassed. I will go back to the beginning of the quote to make sure that everyone gets it right. The Leader of the Opposition said -

No, I don't believe so, and I think if Western Australia, in those areas, decides to do something different or does it according to a different timetable, the impact on competition payments would be quite small.

The Leader of the Opposition was not alone. For once, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was singing the same tune as the Leader of the Opposition. That is a strange phenomenon and does not occur very often. A day earlier on 6PR the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was asked by Mr Adshead -

What do you say about the notion that ... on the back of this decision we do forgo thirty, thirty-five, I don't know how many millions of dollars, from the Federal Government ...

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition said -

... I would be very surprised if he -

Meaning the Premier -

had a loss of anything like that ...

How could the Opposition in a matter of months swing from dismissing the issue of competition payments as a triviality to blaming the State Government for not having factored into the budget a potential loss? The Opposition has no substance, no consistency and no credibility on this issue. Members opposite will say anything to anyone at any time in a desperate chase for votes, even if they end up contradicting themselves.