

MENTAL HEALTH — COMMENTS BY HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH

Statement

HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Minister for Mental Health) [5.49 pm]: Before I respond to that whole lot of rubbish that we have just heard I want to continue with the comments I made last night. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was probably hoping I would respond to all the repeated garbage she has just spoken about —

Hon Sue Ellery: I can see this is going to clear the air!

Hon HELEN MORTON: Not necessarily, but we need to talk about the most significant issue, which showed the height of irresponsibility and recklessness. If members opposite think those words are a character assassination members should listen to what Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich did. As I said last night, the whole mental health sector cringed over the stupidity of the comment made when Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich talked about a man who had rung her office saying that my ministerial staff had screeched at him. I went on to say that she did herself and her credibility a great disservice. It is more important than that; it did great disservice to the mental health sector. She stood up in this place and raised an issue about a person about whom she had not made any contact or attempted to make any contact. More than one of her colleagues contacted me about that particular performance that day. As I said, this is a man who, for years, has been well known to me, my ministerial office, my electorate office, the Chief Psychiatrist and many other people. I could not believe that anyone would take a phone call from someone like that, stand up in this place and start mouthing off without making at least one phone call to check something. I would like to repeat for her sake and anyone else's sake that some people have certain conditions —

Point of Order

Hon SALLY TALBOT: If I may, can I remind the house through you, Mr President, what you said last night when you responded to a situation in the general tenor of saying that members' statements serve a certain purpose and they are not for making ministerial statements. You said the following —

It is sometimes difficult from the chair, but when there is an opportunity and other members are not seeking the call, I will give ministers the opportunity to respond during members' statements if no other member is seeking the call.

Can we have clarification of that ruling in this case?

The PRESIDENT: I said that last night, and that remains the substantive position. Hon Giz Watson has indicated that she wants to speak tonight. I can also see that there appears to be some issues between two members that are of concern to both of them and perhaps other people. Rather than let that matter fester for another week before anyone has an opportunity to say anything, I took the decision to give the call to Hon Helen Morton to give equal time to both members. If the member is unhappy with that, there is a course of action she can take.

Debate Resumed

Hon HELEN MORTON: Thank you, Mr President. I take seriously that when a minister is being spoken about in the way Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich does, they have an opportunity to respond. I would like to remind Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich that some people suffer from conditions. They fit a mental health diagnosis called "personality disorder". These people are highly manipulative, attention seeking and quite histrionic. They threaten that they will do many things, including kill themselves. People have rung me at my electorate office and said that if I do not make this, that or the other thing happen within a certain time frame, they will kill themselves on the front doorstep of my electorate office. My staff take calls from people like this on a regular basis. Everyone who has association with these people on a professional basis knows they are involved in a committed and secure behavioural management plan.

This means that people know who is going to make contact with these people, how those contacts are made, and how frequently they are made. They can then, if people ring them, refer those people to the person who is meant to be making contact with them. There is also usually some email contact around appointments with their specialist et cetera, and about the number of phone calls made and their duration. These people will seek any opportunity to break through that management plan. Unfortunately, that is not because they want to do something bad or silly. It is because that is the nature of their illness. These people may then, through that process, commence a new cycle of pathology.

So, my request to the member is that if she does get that sort of contact, please just pick up the telephone and check. The member does not have to check with my office, but I will put her in touch with the Chief Psychiatrist if that is what she needs.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I do not have much time. I have been on this for two sessions. I have to keep going.

Hon Sue Ellery: It is every member's right to raise any issue.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am not saying that. I am just saying be careful.

All contacts are referred to the Chief Psychiatrist. Our office staff are not there to provide counselling services or psychiatric support. We constantly refer these people to the Chief Psychiatrist. The lady in my office, whom Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich referred to by the name of Rosie, is a highly professional public servant and mental health specialist. She does not screech. She is not rude. She is certainly not high-handed. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich should be ashamed of herself for that outburst. I understand that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has been a staffer. She knows what it is like to work in an office.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! We have listened to the contributions from all other members tonight without interjections. Let us continue in that vein.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Over the three days prior to the member's outburst, my staffer had made and received 10 phone calls in relation to this man. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich would have received a letter from me about this matter, and about her irresponsible and reckless behaviour and the fact that she has referred to one of my staff members by name in this place. This is not the first time Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has used a person's illness to make cheap political points.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I know some members do not like what is being said, and I am not particularly comfortable with it either. But the situation is that various members have made some accusations across the floor, and I have to give every member the opportunity to make their own contribution to that. I would remind members that twice in recent weeks, the opposition Whip has stood to object to members making interjections on one of his member's contributions. So I will apply the same rules to everybody in the chamber.

Point of Order

Hon JON FORD: Mr President, I appreciate what you are saying, and I will make this quick. It seems to me that the minister opposite is using this debate to cast aspersions on the motivation of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. To say that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is somehow a bad person, or is poorly motivated, is reflecting on Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich's character. The rules specifically say that we are not to do that. It seems to me that the minister should be keeping her comments to a debate or a point and not directing them to the member.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I did make a point last night about a couple of things. Firstly, there is a boundary around where people should tread in making personal observations about the character traits of other members. The comments on these matters are running very close to that boundary. If that gets us to standing order 116, I will exercise it. The other point I made last night is that members reap what they sow in this place. That applies to all members. I therefore have to apply a bit of latitude for some members who debate in a certain style to be prepared to accept that same debate back in the same sort of style. It is not comfortable for members, and it is not comfortable for me in the chair, but I think that is a fair way of treating it. The other point I would make is that in future I will be urging members who want to make contributions in this time frame to think about another alternative, and that is to seek leave to make a personal statement on various issues that come up from time to time. I will let Hon Helen Morton continue and finish her contribution.

Debate Resumed

Hon HELEN MORTON: Thank you very much, Mr President. I am not sure what the circumstance is with the time ticking down, and whether I have lost that amount of time; if so, I will seek the call again at another time to finish my remarks. I know that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has received a letter from me about this matter —

The PRESIDENT: Order! I do need to interrupt, because time has expired. Sorry, the minister still has 30 seconds. All that the standing orders provide for is a 40-minute time frame. I will give the member another 30 seconds, because that was my mistake.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I actually have another 27 seconds. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich might like to apologise to my staff member for her outburst. In demonstration of the fact that I do not find the member offensive, and I have no concerns with her whatsoever, I have indicated to the staff in my ministerial office, and in my electorate office, that they need to undergo mental health first aid training to enable them to deal with some of these calls that come through. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich and her staff might benefit from that as well, given the types of calls

that she is going to receive. In fact, I make that offer to anyone in the house who is receiving the sorts of calls that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has mentioned.