

PREMIER — CLIVE PALMER — DEFAMATION PROCEEDINGS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [5.20 pm]: Thank you for this opportunity, Madam President. I rise tonight to reflect on events of the last few days in and around the Parliament of Western Australia. I refer to the present legal action initiated as part of a counterclaim to defamation proceedings brought by Clive Palmer against the Premier and the quality of the government reply to my non-government business motion today, because I think there is a connection somewhat between the two.

I might deal with the litigation matter. It is obvious, I think, that the Premier's defence of why he is engaged in a counter —

Point of Order

Hon PIERRE YANG: I have a point of order.

The PRESIDENT: I think you are probably going to raise the point of order in relation to the potential to overstep the mark on standing order 52 for sub judice matters.

Hon Tjorn Sibma, I know that you will be very careful in your comments so you do not breach that standing order. It is probably worthwhile just reminding you of that, given what you are discussing.

Statement Resumed

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Indeed, I shall be careful, Madam President. I note the urgency with which Hon Pierre Yang sprang to the defence, somewhat pre-emptively, on the Premier's behalf.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I reflect on the Premier's answer to a question put by Hon Michael Mischin today that inquired into the probity of taxpayer support for these kinds of actions taken by ministers of the Crown, including the Premier. I will just make this observation: these kinds of things are discretionary. There is no such thing as them coming at nil cost to the public, and that was conceded in the answer provided today. I understand there is an operating protocol governing the support provided to ministers of the Crown in proceedings such as these; that is, they need to be referred to cabinet and there needs to be at least the semblance of the public interest being served. Indeed, they are contingent upon the minister of the Crown conducting themselves in an appropriate fashion. That is my understanding. Of course, the public conduct of a minister of the Crown is always a matter of subjective judgement, but I note that the Premier felt unrestrained in his public comments about an individual, a larger-than-life figure, Mr Clive Palmer, repeatedly and, I would say, intemperately. This is not a level of behaviour, action or conduct that the Premier has directed solely at Mr Palmer. He has directed this kind of public conduct against members of this chamber and against just about all parties in this chamber. When one sees these histrionics, these claims of defending one's honour against these nasty words expressed by somebody else, one might seek to ask: has the Premier himself established a precedent in his own conduct that he would not like to see repeated by other members of this chamber? It was out of a sense of restraint, perhaps, that the Premier has not found himself subject to the kinds of counterclaims that he has brought against Clive Palmer. But this issue is not actually about Clive Palmer. It is not about the Liberal Party—not at all. This issue speaks more about the insecurity at the heart of the Premier and a particular style of governance, which borders upon, if it does not transgress, the blatantly arrogant.

Only somebody who could believe that they enjoy 91 per cent public approval could jettison priorities in the manner that the Premier seems to do on a daily basis. If I might reflect on this supposed popularity, it seems inconsistent with the litigation counterclaim, because one cannot hold a 91 per cent approval rate and somehow claim that their reputation has been impugned and irretrievably damaged. I do not necessarily see those two arguments holding together particularly well. Only somebody who is overconfident and is taking the public for granted, the media for granted and, dare I say, the next election for granted could conduct themselves in such an unhinged, aggressive and unbecoming manner.

But we are not the victims of this. It is the members of the public of Western Australia who are victims of these kinds of actions, not because of the financial burden, but because of the skewed priorities. Nothing that is of import in Western Australia is being advanced by this Premier's indulgence—not one thing. Nothing that the Premier is undertaking at the moment will go anywhere close to stopping violent crime in Northbridge or violent assaults against the vulnerable elderly. Nothing in this litigation counterclaim will address the shortfall in police resourcing, the mental health crisis or the critical crisis that we find with homelessness—a situation that has been exacerbated by this government's own policy determinations. Nothing in the Premier's self-adulating counterclaim will assist or remedy the worst incident of ambulance ramping in recorded history—records that this government now chooses to not make available to the public. I would not like to have been a person who had a heart attack in the northern suburbs

last Friday afternoon and was in need of an ambulance because there was not one single ambulance available—not one!

I might close on this problem that this government assumes absolutely no responsibility for, and that is to fill and agricultural workforce shortage of between 7 000 and 8 000 people. Four hundred souls have clicked through the government website to express an interest in becoming an agricultural worker. When presented with the obvious deficit, the government shirks responsibility and blames the commonwealth for not guaranteeing top-up payments. Requests have been put by Hon Dr Steve Thomas, our colleagues in the Nationals WA and other regional representatives for the government to take this issue very seriously. Why is it that in Western Australia we cannot solve this pressing agricultural disaster? I think it is because the Premier and the government he leads have become so irretrievably self-obsessed, defensive and hypersensitive that they cannot prioritise what is important to the people and communities of Western Australia or businesses in Western Australia. It is absolutely shameful. In fact, I will say this as well: it is shameful that the Premier has not come in for closer scrutiny or criticism by what passes at the moment as the media in Western Australia.