

MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S INTERESTS — FEMALE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE WORKERS

630. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Women's Interests:

I first acknowledge, in the gallery, Mrs Kirsty Pratt, here on behalf of the many victims of child sexual abuse, waiting for the government to deliver on its election commitment to them.

I refer to the fact that the government has disproportionately targeted women in the Senior Executive Service cuts, with a reduction of 9.6 per cent of women in leadership roles, compared to a 1.76 per cent cut to male roles. Seventeen of the 23 SES positions the government has cut have been women. Can the minister confirm and explain why she has personally overseen a disproportionate loss of women in senior leadership roles in her portfolio, including Emma White, Amanda Gadsdon, Julianne Davies, Sandra van Soelen and Jennifer Matthews?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I am surprised that the opposition has decided to continue with this line of questioning on our government's attitude to promoting women in Western Australia, because it is very clear from our policy as well as what we do that we have every intention of improving the status of women throughout the state, including in the public sector. The names of women who have resigned from the Department of Communities that the member for Scarborough read —

Mr C.J. Barnett: Or were pushed.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member for Cottesloe, from the cheap seats at the back —

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe, I call you to order for the first time, and I also call the member for Wanneroo to order for the first time.

Ms S.F. McGURK: If the opposition has any evidence to contradict that those women resigned and elected themselves to go, I would be interested to see it. In the case of Emma White, for instance, I spoke to her and urged her not to not to resign, and she said that she had made up her mind. She would testify to that; there is no question about that. She was a very valued senior public servant. I make it clear that we not only take the promotion of women throughout the public sector and throughout our community very seriously, but also understand that there is a challenge in government when the overall number of women employed in the public sector is around 70 per cent but 30 per cent at senior levels. It is true that in the first tranche of machinery of government we lost a number of very capable senior women in the SES. We are conscious of that and we intend, through this period of government, to promote women as much of possible. We have said, for instance, that we will work towards having government boards and committees comprise 50 per cent women. We are on the way to doing that, and I said in question time last week that of the appointments that the government has control over since coming to power, two-thirds of those have been women. We have also set up the website OnBoardWA, which I understand has had about 500 expressions of interest, largely from women, who have lodged their interest in joining various government boards and committees. I am very determined that we will make a difference for women in Western Australia, including in the public sector.

Ms A. Sanderson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Morley, I call you to order for the first time.