

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING — PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton — Leader of the Opposition) [3.07 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be moved forthwith —

That this house notes that the Liberal and National Parties call on the Premier to restore confidence in education by sacking the Minister for Education and Training immediately due to her chaotic, ill-informed and arrogant management of the education portfolio.

There is no doubt that any rational observer would say that the Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, has acted in a chaotic, bungling manner in one of our most important areas, public education. It starts, of course, back with Perth Modern School—that is, trying to move Perth Mod without discussing it with the constituents, parents and teachers of Perth Modern.

Point of Order

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The question is that the motion be agreed to. There was an understanding that I would move an amendment. I am happy to do that, but I would like to amend the motion before the substantive motion is debated.

Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Local Government) [3.08 pm]: I move —

To insert after “forthwith” —

, subject to the debate being limited to 10 minutes for government members and 10 minutes for non-government members

Amendment put and passed.

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion, as Amended

The SPEAKER: Members, as this is a motion without notice to suspend standing orders, it will need the support of an absolute majority for it to proceed. If I hear a dissentient voice, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton — Leader of the Opposition) [3.09 pm]: I move the motion. The Labor Party went into my community, and into every other member’s community, promising that if it came to government, it would spend more on education. It promised to rectify the so-called education cuts of the Liberal–National government. It promised that over and over again. The Labor government committed in the budget to spend an additional \$110 million on public education. The Premier enumerated that repeatedly. The government also promised in the budget that it would restrain expenditure. The government indicated before Parliament rose that it would cut the number of people in education headquarters. However, it did not enumerate or identify to Parliament or anyone else the magnitude and detail of the cuts that it has rolled out. The government sneakily and deceptively rolled out those cuts after Parliament rose. Those cuts were all over the place—to the gifted and talented program, Moora Residential College and camp schools. However, the government put a large amount of money into areas that would benefit it electorally. It employed 300 additional education assistants. Those education assistants are all members of the most powerful union on the other side, United Voice. That is why they have been employed. There is no identified need for those additional education assistants. That was a promise that was made by the Labor Party as an electoral sop to its constituency. Schools in the city with a gifted and talented program are struggling because of the government’s decision to cut the funding for that program. The government has increased its spending by \$110 million, in a tight fiscal environment, and it has therefore had to cut programs in areas that it believes are second order. The government is saying that gifted and talented programs, residential colleges in regional areas and camp schools are second order.

We also know that the Premier has backflipped and the spending cut will now be \$41 million and not \$64 million. However, the Premier has not identified the composition of that \$41 million cut. To be truthful, these decisions were made not just by the Minister for Education and Training but by the Expenditure Review Committee, which also comprises the Treasurer, the Premier, the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Commerce. Those ministers are also culpable and responsible for those decisions.

Another issue that has arisen over the past two years is lead contamination of the water at the new Perth Children's Hospital. The Minister for Health has identified that the cause of the problem might be the thermostatic mixing valves. The opposition asked questions of the government in this house about whether the drinking water at schools would be tested to ensure it would be safe for children to drink after it had lain dormant over the summer break, and the government said it would do that testing. Last October, the head of ChemCentre said in evidence to a parliamentary committee that the water pipes in all new schools, at the very least, should be flushed. That is a no-brainer. The government agreed that it was a problem and agreed to test the water. The government had four months to do that, and it not do it. When the government failed to complete the testing in time for the new school year, did it cop it sweet and say, "Yes, we bungled"? No. The government blamed the bureaucrats. The Premier said, "I'm very angry. The minister is great. The bureaucrats are terrible. I'm going to give them a kick in the bum." That is our Premier. He fails to take the blame for the decisions he makes but blames the opposition and everyone else. The Minister for Education and Training made a fundamental mistake about the health of our schoolkids, yet the Premier defended her and attacked everybody else. That is despicable behaviour.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the National Party) [3.14 pm]: It is unprecedented for the National Party and the Liberal Party—indeed, any party—to move a motion for the suspension of standing orders before the Premier has had the opportunity to make his Premier's Statement. The reason we have moved this motion today is the unprecedented activity that has taken place in this state over the last three months, and also today on the steps of Parliament House. Although some members opposite discount the effectiveness of the Country Women's Association in rallying in a very modest way, what the members of the CWA have done today is completely outside their comfort zone. In the 94 years in which the CWA has been in existence, its members have never rallied or protested. Therefore, today is the day for an unprecedented motion. The actions of the Labor Party in making these education cuts are unprecedented. I liken the anger in regional Western Australia to the furore that was created by former Labor minister Jim McGinty when he said that the Royal Flying Doctor Service was nothing more than an interest group. That is how people in regional Western Australia feel about Schools of the Air, residential colleges and the boarding-away-from-home allowance.

Therefore, before the Premier makes his Premier's Statement and lays out his vision for this year and the priorities of his government, we want to give him a chance to apologise and alleviate the grief and distress that has been felt in regional areas over the last three months. It is real distress. It is not confected. This is not political speak on the floor of the Parliament. This distress has been caused by a government that is heartless —

Ms S.F. McGurk: It's because you've wound it up!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is because this government has made it clear to people in regional Western Australia, by its actions and its priorities, that the education of their children does not count.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Morley!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The Premier should take this opportunity to rectify that situation and apologise.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members on my right!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We all know that when we make an apology, we need to follow it up with actions.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members for Hillarys and Mandurah!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The Premier now has the opportunity to reverse the cuts and to sack the Minister for Education and Training —

Several members interjected.

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

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — who has been responsible for at least three of these bungled decisions, which the Premier had to step in and overturn. The Premier understood that people in regional Western Australia would rally against these decisions. People in the Perth metropolitan area then started to rally against these decisions. That is because when the government makes cuts to our education system, everyone is offended. There is statewide support for the position that we are putting. We are giving the Premier, before he makes his Premier's Statement and talks about all the positive things his government will do this year, the opportunity to include a statement about Moora Residential College, the agricultural colleges, the boarding-away-from-home allowance and the raft of other cuts the government has made —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: And the camp schools—thank you, member for Warren–Blackwood—that are all important parts of not only our education system but also our regional communities. This is the Premier’s opportunity. The Premier should reverse the cuts, remove the minister who made these bungled decisions, and restore confidence in the education system in Western Australia. It has been dealt a cruel blow. The way in which the government announced these cuts was incredibly cruel. The government announced these cuts after Parliament had risen for the year, and in the run-up to Christmas, when it thought people would not care and would not have the gumption to stand up against these cuts. However, people not only across regional Western Australia but also in metropolitan Perth proved the Premier wrong, with petitions, rallies and letters to the editor. The Premier came back from leave and knew that his Minister for Education and Training had overstepped the mark. The question is whether the Premier wants to have this hang around his neck for the remainder of the year—that his government’s legacy is to cut education in the bush. The Premier should come clean with the electorate, admit that he took part in making this decision, and make it right.

We in the opposition can stand proud of our record in education. We invested in regional education facilities. We invested in senior high schools across regional Western Australia and in residential colleges so that kids can go to school closer to home.

Several members interjected.

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

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The Premier and the Minister for Education and Training stood on the steps of Parliament House today and told everyone, “Don’t worry, you can go somewhere else. Travel a little bit further. Move a little bit further away from your family.” Moora Residential College is important. The agricultural colleges are important. Education close to home is important. This is a government, in relation to the agricultural colleges, that is lauding its agriculture minister as the best thing since sliced bread. She is out there telling everyone that the government is going to rejuvenate agriculture in Western Australia. That cannot be done if there is neither the people nor the workforce to drive that economy. The government is taking the funding that allows them to be the shining stars of agricultural education in this nation. That is well known. It is cutting it all. It is time for the Minister for Agriculture and Food to go. If the government does not act, those decisions are its to bear for the remainder of this year and this term.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.20 pm]: What a half-hearted attack! One thing I have learnt today, watching the Liberal Party in particular, is: my goodness, they miss the member for Cottesloe! At least he had a bit of strategy and a bit of aggression. He could actually speak in public as well. That is why they miss him so much. It is only day one without him here.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was a half-hearted attack because the National Party knows that it has behaved disgracefully today. Look at its social media feed. It has behaved disgracefully. The Leader of the National Party should apologise for the behaviour of the National Party today for the sorts of things it is putting online. In society, particularly at the moment, there is a lot of commentary around these sorts of issues. The National Party is displaying shocking social media behaviour. It should be embarrassed about and apologise for its bullying social media behaviour.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Premier.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is clear from the Leader of the Opposition that he does not agree with education assistants in schools.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition one simple question: do you agree with Aboriginal and Islander education officers?

Dr M.D. Nahan: We put 7 500 EAs there.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, he won’t answer the question. We can deduce from that that, no, he does not support the Aboriginal and Islander education officers we are putting into schools.

Dr M.D. Nahan: It was a 50 per cent increase, and you complain about it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: When in office, the Liberal Party cut them out from the most vulnerable schools in Western Australia. I remember going to Kununurra senior high school back in 2015 when 17 AIEOs had been cut.

There is a loss of that support network for Indigenous children in remote communities across Western Australia. In light of that, is it any —

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the third time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: In light of that, is it any wonder the Liberal and National Parties in Western Australia do not say boo about the loss of \$100 million for remote housing across our state? If the Liberal Party is so supportive of regional people, why is it not standing up for Aboriginal people in the regions? It does not say a word about what is happening in regional communities across Western Australia.

During question time, in response to the question from the member for Moore, I explained the situation in relation to Moora Residential College. I will give members a brief synopsis. There are 27 students. It requires \$8.7 million in repairs, which the former government knew about for six years. It committed the money on the death knock of the government. The Labor Party did not commit the money to those 27 students. We have pointed out that there are a range of residential colleges closer in proximity to where many, if not most, of the students live. Surely members opposite can see the argument there—that to spend \$8.7 million doing up a residential facility for 27 people, when there are three or four other residential facilities closer to where most of those people live, is not a sensible use of taxpayers' money. We are going to work with the families affected to transition those students to other schools.

The National Party—I have seen this my entire life because I grew up in regional communities; I saw it as a kid—tries constantly to turn country people against the city. That is its modus operandi. That is its reason for being. The irony is that a lot of the National Party members live in the city. That is the great irony.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the member for North West Central, the Leader of the National Party and the member for Moore. This is not a shouting match. The National Party brought this up; let the Premier have his say.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The irony is that a lot of them live in the city. A lot of the National Party MPs are far more gentrified and city-fied than Labor MPs. Look at you! Maybe not the member for Moore—he is very country—but the rest of you are very much city folk. Maybe not the member for Roe. All they do is base their political careers upon trying to turn country people against the city. Bear in mind that I spent the first 17 years of my life in regional communities. Labor believes in standing for everyone across our community. That is why we are putting —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I know that National Party members want to make their points. I will stand here and take up time, but the Premier will not be able to have his say and you will not hear what he has to say.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The National Party is a geographically sectarian party. That is what it does; it is geographically sectarian. It feasts on this, trying to stir up trouble across the regions all the time, rather than looking at the totality. The National Party is part of the opposition. The Liberal Party does not like it, but the National Party is part of the opposition. It does not look at the totality of what the government is doing or what it has to deal with. It should come in here every single day and apologise for the debt and deficit that it left. It lives in this world whereby what happened back then does not matter: “We’re just worried about today and we’re worried about turning country people against the city.” This government has to deal with the former government’s legacy. We have to govern in the interests of all Western Australians. That is what we are doing. I explained the situation in Moora. It is regrettable. I feel great empathy for the people in Moora who do not agree with this decision. When it is explained, I challenge anyone not to understand that the government has a reasonable policy position on that.

In the case of the so-called camp schools, they are not actually schools—they are camps. One of them that the government is ceasing —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: When is the member for Warren–Blackwood going to challenge for the leadership rather than carping away there? We all know what he is up to. Everyone knows what he is up to, and the Leader of the National Party knows it, too. There might be a few changes in National Party leadership across the country shortly!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Premier.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Everyone knows what the member for Warren–Blackwood is up to. Across the country, the National Party might have a revolution!

In the case of the camps, there are at least 20 different options across the state—run by the department of sport and recreation and by not-for-profit organisations. We are seeking to transition the camp schools from Education to a not-for-profit operator and save the taxpayers, from memory, at least \$7 million. What is wrong with that? Why is the National Party trying to stir up trouble over something as reasonable as that?

Mr D.T. Redman: No not-for-profits are going to take them on, and you know that!

Mr M. McGOWAN: No. We know what you're up to. Every time you open your mouth, I am going to mention the fact you are undermining the leader.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The great underminer over there! I know what he is angry about. It is that the Leader of the National Party backed Brendon Grylls. That really got under his skin. It did, didn't it?

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We will wait and see. We are watching carefully. She was your deputy and she voted for Brendon. I must say that was pretty galling. The Point Peron facility is in my electorate of Rockingham. What is unreasonable about transitioning it to a not-for-profit operator and removing the burden to taxpayers? Why would the opposition not support that? The Liberal Party moved this motion about sacking the education minister. Why does the Liberal Party not sack Hon Peter Collier? He has brawls in public places. He has fights in public places. How is he fit to be a shadow minister? Here is hypocrisy writ large—when the Liberal Party has a senior shadow minister, its leader in the upper house, having fights in public places. Of all things, the Liberal Party should not be calling for people's resignations.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: It was not in a public place.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was not in a public place? Is the Rottnest hotel not a public place? Give me a break. Honestly, it is disgraceful conduct by members of the Liberal Party. I feel sorry for the member for South Perth being set upon by Hon Peter Collier and for the shocking words that were said to him. Hon Peter Collier used the word beginning with C—"cretin". He described the member for South Perth as a cretin. That is shocking stuff. That is who should be sacked. Hon Sue Ellery is doing a good job in difficult circumstances and I totally support her.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion as amended be agreed to. All those in favour say aye.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Against say no.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I think the noes have it.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear a "divide".

Motion thus negatived.