

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

542. Mr J.N. CAREY to the Minister for Local Government:

I refer to the local government elections currently underway.

- (1) How many candidates have nominated?
- (2) What is the level of female representation?
- (3) Can the minister advise the house of any concerns relating to how some campaigns have been run?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for Perth for the question and acknowledge the great reforming processes that he put in place when he was the Mayor of Vincent and his leadership.

It is important to note that we are coming to the end of the local government elections. On 21 October, throughout Western Australia, we will see the conclusion of an election process that has been for me, as the minister, very interesting. I will make some brief comments about some of the things that have concerned me with regard to these 2017 elections.

There are 1 388 candidates who have nominated for this election. This is a record number of people who have put themselves forward. I congratulate them and I acknowledge them for putting themselves forward for their communities, and I wish them well. The number of women, though, is 481. It remains low. It is an area that, again, I know has been a challenge for local government for a number of years, but we need to change this. We need to have greater representation of women and we need to have greater representation of diversity, so that we have councils that reflect the diversity of their communities. We also need more younger people. I unashamedly say that: we need more younger people.

There have been number of examples—in fact, some members have highlighted examples from their local constituencies and local government areas that they represent in their electorates of some concerning things that have occurred in campaigns over the last month or so. Again, the example of the young woman in Mosman Park. A 21-year-old young woman who wants to put herself forward—as she should—and who heeded the call, if you like, for greater diversity and for young people. She put herself forward and then got slammed through social media by some very, very dubious—in many respects anonymous—groups that attacked her because she was simply putting forward that she believes there should be more young people in local government. There have been a number of examples. I think in a number of electorates candidates have been attacking each other, some sitting members of council up for re-election have been having slanging matches—that is inappropriate—and very, very disturbing social media attacks. It is unacceptable.

Unfortunately, I have a great concern that this sort of behaviour actually has the potential to intimidate people from putting themselves forward. Indeed, if we want greater diversity, it may impede people in our communities who we know have great skills, great potential and great opportunity. They may in fact be deterred from putting themselves forward. I am concerned.

Member for Perth, one of the things I am going to do after this weekend, after the elections are concluded, is call a roundtable meeting with the department, the Western Australian Local Government Association and local government professionals—and request that the Electoral Commissioner be at that meeting—because I think we need to talk about this campaign we have seen in the last month or so, which concludes on Saturday. I want to talk about what we need to do collectively to try to address some of this serious stuff that has been occurring, because it will only deter good people from putting themselves forward and it will have an impact on what we know already are very, very low turnout and participation rates. We want more people participating in the voting process in local government elections, and we want more people from diverse backgrounds contributing to their communities by putting their hands up. If they are going to be deterred by this sort of behaviour, it needs to be dealt with.