

DEAFNESS FORUM

Statement

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [6.30 pm]: I have had quite a busy break. I have had some fun. I attended a deafness forum with Hon Martin Pritchard, who seems to have disappeared from the chamber. It was interesting to see the number of experts at the forum. They described the journey that people who are hard of hearing tend to go through. Basically, when people start losing their hearing, they are in denial for a while. They are not quite sure what is going on, they blame other people for mumbling, they think the television is not loud enough and those sorts of things. Unlike when someone loses their eyesight, when we lose our hearing, we are not aware of what we are not hearing. When someone loses their eyesight, they bump into things and it is fairly obvious that they might need glasses or some help. With hearing loss, that is not necessarily the case.

There were some amazing people at the forum. There were people from a program for early childhood intervention who had trained early childhood educators to test children. The children would have one to two tests to make sure they had hearing issues and then they would be referred on. One of the main causes of childhood deafness or loss of hearing is middle ear infections. If we can pick that up really early, children can be put onto antibiotics and perhaps have little tubes called grommets put in their ears to help prevent hearing damage. It turns out that Aboriginal children in particular are very prone to middle ear infections. They often do not get picked up. When children lose their hearing when they are that young, they basically deal with an impairment that they might not be aware of for the rest of their life. Looking at education in particular, when children go to school and cannot hear, they do not know what is going on. They might be disruptive in class because they do not know whether the teacher is speaking, so the opportunity for learning is much reduced.

One gentleman who was very innovative started something called the Earbus Foundation of Western Australia. I think there are seven Earbus programs now. The buses have been decorated with designs painted by the children in the region that they visit. Earbus visits schools and captures those children who would not necessarily go to a clinic.

It was also interesting to learn about the technical developments that we are seeing with hearing aids. I am quite pleased with the ones I have. They are semi-permanent. They stay in for about six weeks at a time. I have a little magnet that allows me to turn them off or increase or decrease the volume. Members might see me fiddling with my ears. I am not picking at them; I am just changing the volume. In that regard, I have to say that this chamber can be very challenging at times. I really miss Hon Alannah MacTiernan, because she was beautifully loud, and I loved that. I always knew I could hear her contributions.

One thing we noticed at the deafness forum was that the area where the reception was held had beautiful cement floors, very flat walls and very flat ceilings. Even those people who were not hearing impaired had trouble hearing in that area. Simple things that we discussed at the time that could be adjusted and included to help those who were hard of hearing included architectural designs to make sure there is less of an echo, beautiful tapestries on the walls or things like that. I have seen slatted walls in some newer buildings. I quite like those because they stop the echo. I would love to see more of that basically because as most people age, they will have some sort of hearing loss. That is normal. I have lost about 70 per cent of my hearing, which is a significant hearing loss. I suffer from severe FOMO to go with that. I hate that I miss out on things. I find it difficult to go to theatre shows, band concerts and things like that. Comedy shows are very challenging because I simply cannot hear. I would love to see subtitles for all those shows. That would be really good. I do not know when that will happen. I am seeing some changes with Zoom and Teams, which have closed captions. It would be great if we could move forward with that.

House adjourned at 6.35 pm
