

MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE, PREMIER'S SUPPORT

937. Mr BARNETT to the Premier:

Given the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure's answer to the member for Carine's question relating to the purchase of \$46 752 worth of promotional hats and coffee mugs last December, I ask -

- (1) In view of the Premier's promise to reduce expenditure on advertising and promotions, does he condone such an extravagant and wasteful use of taxpayers' funds?

Ms MacTiernan: Don't you support the TravelSmart program?

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BARNETT: Shall I repeat that, Mr Speaker?

The SPEAKER: No.

Mr BARNETT: My question continues -

- (2) Given the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure's track record, including covering up her appalling driving record, endorsing a costly departmental barbecue during working hours, publicly casting a slur on members of a peaceful religious group by comparing them to the Taliban, and failing to be open with the public about plans to introduce paid parking at Hillarys Boat Harbour, does she still have the Premier's support?

Points of Order

Mr KOBELKE: The question contains clear allegations about the minister. As such, it should not be allowed; it is outside the standing orders. If the Leader of the Opposition wishes to make allegations about the minister, he should do so by substantive motion, not in a question.

Mr JOHNSON: The question contains no allegations. The leader is asking the Premier about the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure's actions. Clearly, she has done everything to which the leader has referred; he is not making allegations. It is a perfectly concise, simple question. Just because the minister has five staffers in the Speaker's gallery to answer a simple question -

Several members interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: It is a genuine question.

Mr BARNETT: The question is sensitive for the minister and the Premier.

Several members interjected.

Mr BARNETT: This is important. The minister's driving history is a matter of public record, as is the departmental barbecue, her use of the word Taliban in relation to the brethren and the confusion about paid parking at Hillarys Boat Harbour. The question refers to those issues, but specifically asks the Premier whether he still supports his minister. That is a proper question, particularly from a Leader of the Opposition to a Premier. The Premier should be required to answer it.

The SPEAKER: Members on both sides often do not agree with questions or answers. I listened reasonably carefully to the question, and I do not think it contained any allegations. I am sure members on my right do not like the question, but it stands.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(2) I could visit the Minister for Health and have a cup of tea using the Wedgwood tea set in his office. I could also move 20 per cent of the health budget to the Government's advertising and promotions program.

Mr Omodei interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Warren-Blackwood will come to order! The member should not make me stand again. He is not to interject during question time.

Dr GALLOP: This Government has delivered on its commitment to cut advertising expenditure. That money is being spent on very important services in Western Australia. All government departments have been subjected to extensive investigation as part of the budget process. When the budget is delivered, members opposite will see how this Government, unlike the previous Government, has control of public expenditure. It would be interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition explain where he would cut public expenditure.

The other issue raised in the question relates to credibility and the relationship between leaders and their ministers. National Party members will be very interested in my answer. The credibility of only one person in this Parliament is at stake in the political debates being conducted in this State; that is, the Leader of the Opposition. I will examine his credibility in the context of electricity supplies. The member for Collie will be interested in this. In December 2000, when he was Minister for Energy, the leader announced his power procurement policy.

Point of Order

Mr JOHNSON: This is a genuine point of order.

Several members interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: Members on this side raise only genuine points of order. Under standing orders, answers must be relevant to questions. The Premier's answer has no relevance to the question; it was about him and his Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: As I said in reference to the last point of order, often members do not like answers or questions. The Premier is answering the question as he sees fit. I ask him to continue.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr GALLOP: This is a very interesting issue.

Mr Barnett: What does it have to do with hats and mugs?

Dr GALLOP: It has a lot to do with the Leader of the Opposition's credibility. In December 2000, the Leader of the Opposition announced the coalition Government's power procurement policy. He said that a mid-merit power procurement was required. He also said that his Government would purchase 240 megawatts to come on line by January 2005 and 120 megawatts to come on line by January 2006. The member for Collie knows this story very well; it was a hotly debated issue. Dr Hilda Turnbull, the then National Party member for Collie, said -

Mr Johnson: It must be relevant.

Dr GALLOP: It is very relevant. Dr Turnbull said -

... the opportunity for coal to bid in the 2004-05 round had come as a result of representations by the coal companies, deputy premier Hendy Cowan and herself, resulting in the aggregation option.

Points of Order

Mr JOHNSON: Under standing orders, an answer must be relevant to the question. I am not canvassing your previous ruling, Mr Speaker, but you implied that the Premier should get on with answering the question and perhaps bring it to a conclusion. It is a simple fact that the Premier is so afraid to answer the question and stand up for his minister that he will use any tactic he can. I ask that his answer be relevant.

Mr BARNETT: I ask the Speaker to note Standing Order No 78, which states -

An answer must be relevant to the question.

I asked the Premier a question about expenditure totalling \$46 752 by officers and departments under the minister's control. The standing order requires that the Premier's answer be relevant to the question. My question was about expenditure on hats and mugs. It does not relate to electricity. I am happy to debate electricity any time on any day. The House can debate electricity immediately after question time concludes today. The Premier has ignored Standing Order No 78; I hope the Speaker will not ignore it. At no stage has the Premier said a single word to defend his minister.

The SPEAKER: The standing order is quite explicit. Answers to questions must be relevant. The Premier has decided to go down a different track in order to make his point. I am sure it will lead to the answer of the specific question asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr GALLOP: This goes to the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition in relation to his members. The minister said there would be two tenders - one for 240 megawatts and one for 120 megawatts. The former member for Collie, Dr Turnbull, said that was not right; that there was to be an aggregated tender because it would allow Collie to compete. The article states -

Dr Turnbull said Cabinet minutes had recorded that if coal were successful in the 2004-05 procurement considerations then there needed to be an allowance for the longer establishment lead time.

What was the policy of the then Liberal Government on power procurement? Was it an aggregation of 240 megawatts and 120 megawatts or a separation? I ask the Leader of the Opposition whether it was aggregation or separation. Apparently there was no cabinet decision. Did the Leader of the Opposition announce a policy?

Mr Barnett: The policy announced during the election campaign was quite clear. It was to retain Western Power as an integrated identity.

Dr GALLOP: That was not the question. What was the former Government's policy on power procurement? Was it 240 megawatts plus 120 megawatts or was it 360 megawatts?

Mr Barnett: What a farce! Does the Premier know how procurement works?

Dr GALLOP: I think the member for Stirling knows something about this. He is the former Deputy Premier. The National Party knows something about this. This is about a minister in a Government shafting his colleagues! When the Leader of the Opposition was a minister in the previous Government he shafted his colleagues, particularly those in the National Party. They know that. That is why they are not saying anything. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has my support. No previous Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, responsible for the transport portfolio of this State, has been as innovative and creative as the current minister. The Leader of the Opposition does not want to talk about community forums to solve issues such as heavy haulage transport. He does not want to talk about a minister who has opened up the debate about the State's rail system so that we get a decent result for the people of Western Australia. He does not want to talk about a minister who involves the community in planning decisions.

My answer to the question is summarised in this way: we want to know from the Leader of the Opposition what the cabinet decision was on power procurement. Dr Turnbull, the former member for Collie, said one thing and he has said another. We want to know what it is, because it goes to the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition. What is the answer?

Mr Barnett: Power procurement was outlined in a press release that set out a three-stage process starting with the re-engineering of the Kwinana Power Station to burn only gas, not coal. I am pleased that the Government has continued with that decision and that work is under way. The second stage was to introduce mid-merit. The third stage was to introduce base load. A proper cabinet process is one that makes the actual decision on time. One cabinet decision was to proceed with Kwinana against the second and third proposals. Had we been returned to government, each of those proposals would have gone to Cabinet formally. We only made the decision on the project of the day, which was Kwinana. We explained publicly how stages two and three would follow; that is, in a 10-year program. It was not the time to make a decision on a procurement process on the second and third stages. It is now time that they were pursued.

Dr GALLOP: Would the Leader of the Opposition agree to let the Government see those cabinet documents? The former member for Collie said that cabinet minutes recorded that if Collie were successful, it would be given an allowance for the longer establishment lead time. Is that true?

Mr Barnett: The cabinet decision was to proceed with Kwinana. That is what happened.

Dr GALLOP: There is a creditability issue here. The former member for Collie and the National Party are saying one thing and the Leader of the Opposition is saying another. Does the Leader of the Opposition mind if the Government accesses cabinet records?

Mr Barnett: You cannot just access cabinet records.

Dr GALLOP: Open and accountable!