

PAUL ALBERT - ADVICE TO MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

899. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Premier:

On 17 October this year the Premier said -

I had the highest regard for Paul Albert as a professional person and, as a matter of fact, as a person. I had a detailed and lengthy conversation with Mr Albert in the office last night and I accepted his version of events.

On the same day the Premier also said about his Minister for Education and Training that if he did not have confidence in the minister, she would not be doing the job.

- (1) Does the Premier accept Mr Albert's recollection of the number of times he informed the minister of the Corruption and Crime Commission's investigations, and did he provide the Premier with this information during their detailed and lengthy conversation?
- (2) Given the conflicting evidence, who is telling the truth, and does the Minister for Education and Training still have the Premier's full confidence?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

- (1)-(2) I still have, and probably always will have, very high regard for Paul Albert as a professional and as a person. I think he is an outstanding individual. Mr Albert and I had a lengthy conversation on that day - I assume the date the Leader of the Opposition mentioned is correct - about the position that had arisen and what would be the best way forward. As I reported to the Parliament and as I have reported numerous times publicly, Mr Albert told me that he had been given advice from the Corruption and Crime Commission that he should not provide to the minister any detail of the investigation that was under way into matters pertaining to the complaints management unit of the Department of Education and Training. In fact, he found it extraordinary that he had that advice, but it was the advice he had been given. He produced a letter to support his statement on that advice.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Dawesville!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: He produced a letter to substantiate his position that he had been constrained in his ability to alert the minister in any detail to the issues that were under investigation. He thought that was most unfortunate. He told me about another letter he had from the CCC, which he produced for me the following day and which addressed the same issues. As I recall, I tabled the letter in the Parliament. That letter indicated that the matters the CCC was working on with the Department of Education and Training were progressing satisfactorily. He thought that the two letters were somewhat incongruous. He was extremely frustrated about the position he found himself in, but he accepted that ultimately the responsibility for the issues the investigation was looking at was his. In our discussion it was decided that in order to restore confidence in the education department he would take early retirement. That is the issue. Although I have not read the transcript of Mr Albert's evidence yesterday, I have been given information via the media about what Mr Albert said. To my mind the basis of it agrees with the thrust of what he told me. He told the inquiry yesterday that at no stage had he been able to provide the minister with any details of the issues that were under investigation.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the members for Dawesville, Darling Range and Murdoch to order.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: As I understand it, he told the upper house committee yesterday that the department had a policy of not informing the minister of investigations involving staff. He told the inquiry that at no stage was there any briefing provided to the minister about the issues that are the subject of discussion. There was no verbal or written briefing. The minister's version of events is given very strong support by the other witnesses who spoke yesterday at the committee. People from her office were asked about their level of awareness. I think two of them - there may have been others - said that at no stage were they alerted to the details of any investigation that was happening in the education department; in fact, not only that, but as anybody who looked at it with an objective eye would have noticed, there was the startling piece of evidence from the representative of the CCC who said that when he informed the minister of the matters under investigation she was "gobsmacked" and apparently clearly knew nothing of the issues at hand. The other evidence to the upper house committee lends strong support to the minister's position. I can understand why the minister is feeling a degree

of frustration. I think that Mr Albert's evidence yesterday indicated that on several occasions, in passing and not in any formalised way -

Mr T. Buswell: He said he told her in a briefing.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: He did not. He said that in passing he had mentioned the issue of the investigation. It must be recognised that at no stage was any formal briefing given to the minister. At no stage did he sit her down and say that there were issues that should be brought to her attention.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the members for Roe and Darling Range to order.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: It almost defies belief that the member for Vasse, of all people in this Parliament, has the audacity to raise any sort of issue relating to this matter. I leave it at that. May I tell the member for Vasse something? My judgment is occasionally faulty, but at the moment my judgment -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: In my humble opinion the political career of the member for Vasse is effectively over. His political career was terminated last week, or perhaps the day when he made the decision to climb into the car with Noel Crichton-Browne and collaborate on what evidence the member for Vasse would give to the CCC. That was the moment when his political career was effectively over. That may of course explain why the Leader of the Opposition is, we understand, in conversation with the previous Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kalgoorlie, about whether or not they can get back together and get him back onto the front bench.

Mr P.D. Omodei: You have been talking to the member for Ballajura!

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The Leader of the Opposition has had his chance to show his credentials about accountability and has failed.

Mr P.D. Omodei: You are like a drowning man clutching at straws.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I believe that Mr Albert's evidence was given in good faith. The fact that he has a different recollection from the one that everybody else seems to have I do not think makes him a dishonest person, or the others; they simply have different recollections. Bear in mind, as anybody who has had a busy portfolio would know, on any one day dozens and sometimes scores of issues can be brought to a minister's attention, and some in the most perfunctory way. If they are important, a minister will expect to be given a detailed briefing. If they are not, dozens or scores of issues may be brought to a minister's attention in a perfunctory way. If the recollection of Mr Albert is that on one occasion he spoke to the minister while they were walking along a corridor, is it surprising that the same recollection is not powerfully embedded in the minister's mind?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the member for Roe and the member for South Perth.