

CANNABIS, DECRIMINALISATION

719. Mr R.F. JOHNSON to the Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth:

I refer the minister to the strong support she expressed in this House on 16 April for the Government's decision to decriminalise the possession and cultivation of cannabis when she said -

... we have the guts to take on these social issues and deliver a good social policy.

Mr R.C. Kucera: What were you smoking outside a few minutes ago?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It certainly was not cannabis. I have never touched it, but I bet some of the guys opposite have.

Mr R.C. Kucera interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, it does not; the minister should not be stupid. I will continue -

- (1) Is the minister aware that *The British Journal of Psychiatry* recently found that the progression from adolescent cannabis use to dependence in young adulthood is strong?
- (2) Is the minister further aware that Melbourne's Centre for Adolescent Health, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, the University of Maastricht, the World Health Organisation, the Australian Medical Association and the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research have all found that cannabis use can trigger severe mental health illnesses, especially in young children?

Ms S.M. McHALE replied:

- (1)-(2) I did say that this Government had the guts to introduce a good social policy, and it does have the guts to do so. I am aware of the research into cannabis and its potential to trigger mental illnesses; I think all policy makers are aware of that. The member would do well to look very carefully at the research and at whether the causal link has been established.

Several members interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: There is a whole complexity underneath that research about the link between cannabis smoking, mental illness and the progression to other drugs. Other indicators will lead to mental illness, and it is not a straightforward causal effect.

As Minister for Youth and as a parent, I am aware of the issues surrounding cannabis. However, I am aware that thousands of young people in the community are currently smoking cannabis and have been for years. As a parent first and foremost, I am aware of the dangers. However, I am also aware that if we leave the legislation within a criminal context, the real difficulties for young people will become even more magnified.

Let me make it clear again: cannabis smoking remains unlawful under the Government's legislation. If opposition members refuse to accept that for political point-scoring purposes, that is their problem, not ours. Cannabis smoking remains unlawful, but our legislation introduces other penalties and programs that will strengthen the protective measures around cannabis. The Opposition does not like that. It is a worry for parents that their children will smoke. However, that worry, plus the knowledge that it may ruin their future careers for a long time, is much worse. This is a Government that is about making good social policy. That does not necessarily come easy, but we are clear that this is good policy.