

**TEACHERS - REMOTE AREA HOUSING**

*Grievance*

**MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood - Leader of the Opposition)** [9.06 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Education and Training and concerns the young teacher who has been given a job at Wingellina Remote Community School, and the circumstances in which he and his wife have found themselves.

**Mr M. McGowan:** Is it not your deputy giving the grievance? I was advised that it was your deputy's grievance.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The agenda states that the Leader of the Opposition is presenting this grievance.

**Mr M. McGowan:** Okay. I was told yesterday that it was your deputy who would present the grievance.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** By whom?

**Mr M. McGowan:** By your side.

**Mr T. Buswell** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The agenda of the Parliament states that the Leader of the Opposition is to give this grievance. I would have thought that the minister would read the agenda. The grievance concerns Jason McCrae and his partner Sam Turner. Jason was given a job at Wingellina. There has been some toing and froing across the chamber on this issue. This matter begs a grievance to the minister so that the minister can clarify to the Parliament and to teachers in Western Australia what he will do about conditions for teachers in remote areas of Western Australia. I will give some background to this issue. Jason was given a job at Wingellina Remote Community School. When he arrived, he was told by the principal of the school that his house was not in a fit condition to be lived in, so he had to drive 160 kilometres back to Warburton. Sam gave birth to young Jack two months prematurely. That issue should be of concern to the couple's employers. Giving birth prematurely is a traumatic experience for any young couple, whether or not they are living next to the best hospital and medical facilities. This couple is living in substandard conditions. When they arrived at Wingellina on 24 September for a three-day work commitment, they found that the house was in an atrocious condition. The minister said yesterday that a plumber had been dispatched to Wingellina from Alice Springs, but when he got there, he could not fix the issue. In the meantime, Jason and Sam are back in Warburton, living in very cramped quarters. The accommodation at the roadhouse in Warburton is run-down, and the issue continues to go on and on.

I understand that Jason is of the view that he actually spoke to the Minister for Education and Training. The minister can correct that if he wishes, and I think he has tried to before. However, a conversation took place and the person whom Jason spoke to - this might jog the minister's memory - talked about referring the matter to the government and that he would get back to Jason. I presume that was John Sanderson. In the meantime, this couple has been treated very poorly.

One could say that Warburton and Wingellina are very distant from any real civilisation, and I know that for a fact because my sister has been teaching in those areas for a number of years. Before sending somebody to a remote place, it is important to provide, firstly, liveable conditions that are suitable for the conditions of the area. Obviously, air conditioning is fundamental, as is having a clean house and proper ablution facilities. I believe that this young couple has been treated very poorly by the department and by the minister. I would hope that if I had been in the minister's place, I would have rung Jason myself to clarify the issue and to offer assistance to the family, given the couple's special circumstances in that they have a six-week-old premature baby. That in itself must surely tug at the minister's heartstrings or his conscience. I put it to members: would anyone bring his wife and almost two months' premature baby to a remote community? If members did, they would expect to have reasonable living conditions.

I think this couple has been put in a very difficult situation. The couple is more than willing to negotiate an outcome that is agreeable to the parties involved, but all they have encountered is unsuitable options and strongarm tactics. They have been in regular contact with the Leader of the Opposition's office. For somebody to have to continually, day after day, ring the opposition party's office to get some assistance, or for us to raise the issue, is unacceptable. It is an unacceptable situation and the minister should move very quickly to resolve the issue.

On Monday, 22 October, the couple was offered the home at Warakurna. That community, again, is at least 200 kilometres from Wingellina, and the offer was declined because of the lack of healthcare facilities for Jason's post-operative partner and their six-week-old son, so they are still in Warburton. On Tuesday, 23 October - this is very recent, of course - the couple approached the Department of Education and Training to

outline their desire to return to their home in Victoria, to which a response has yet to be given. On the first day that this issue was raised in Parliament, the minister should have rung Jason McRae straightaway and sorted the matter out. Yesterday, Wednesday, 24 October, Jason's government-supplied vehicle was confiscated. He was requested to give up the keys, leaving him, his partner and a six-week-old premature baby who really needs care and compassion stranded in Warburton.

I would like the minister to stand in the Parliament and give us a very clear explanation. My request to him, in all sincerity, is that the minister himself ring Jason McRae today and resolve the issue to the couple's benefit. If they want to go back to Victoria, the minister should assist them to do that or assist them to go to a place that is conducive to Jason providing his services to the Department of Education and Training and making sure that the baby is looked after properly.

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham - Minister for Education and Training)** [9.14 am]: As I said in my earlier remarks, I am sorry about the situation that this teacher finds himself in. It must be very difficult to be out in that community with a six-week-old child. The Department of Education and Training has worked extremely hard to try to resolve this issue with Mr McRae, and I have been monitoring the issue and the attempts to resolve it on a daily basis.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Can I interject?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, away you go.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** Can you ring him? Why do you not just ring him today?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The opposition has attempted to inflame this issue each day in the Parliament by making false allegations. The Leader of the Opposition has, in a manner of speaking, just repeated them: that somehow I was spoken to and I did all these things, when I was not spoken to by the teacher in question. The Leader of the Opposition's deputy put this issue on the agenda yesterday with the government. He said he would come in and grieve to us, but he has now chickened out; he has left the issue to the Leader of the Opposition, after misleading the house last week over this matter.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** It does not matter who grieves to you!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Leader of the Opposition does not think misleading the house is important? I actually think it is. If the Leader of the Opposition does not think it is important, that is up to him.

Returning to this teacher, he has been offered two houses in recent days that he could occupy. He has also been offered accommodation at the nearest thing to a motel in that community, which, unfortunately, is a roadhouse.

**Mr P.D. Omodei** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** He has declined those three offers of accommodation and has chosen to live in the location at which he currently lives. At the moment, we are attempting to fix the house in Wingellina that, once it is ready, will be available for him to live in, if he chooses to do so. As the Leader of the Opposition himself said, it is a very distant and difficult location in which to fix the properties in question. That is the truth of the matter; it is difficult. It is not the south west; it is not Perth - it is a very, very remote location, and we are working as hard as we can to fix the house. However, the teacher has been offered three separate accommodation options, which he has declined.

He arrived here at the start of the year and his wife, obviously, gave birth more recently to a child that, as has been said, was premature and is now six or seven weeks old. Naturally, when someone has a six or seven-week-old child, it is difficult in any event, and it is probably a lot more difficult out in that location.

Other allegations made by the opposition include the allegation thrown in this place yesterday about Mr McRae's car being removed from him. The vehicle is provided for the role of Department of Education and Training coordinator, and it is available for use under the direction of the line manager. This vehicle is for use in moving between schools across the lands area for official purposes only. The vehicle has not been removed from Mr McRae. However, Mr McRae's father-in-law is with Mr McRae, and he wanted to visit a community by the name of Blackstone. Mr McRae wanted to use the government vehicle to drive him to Blackstone, which is 300 kilometres away, and the department declined that request because it said that it was not a government use of the vehicle. If that is the case, and I have been advised that it is the case, I support the department.

Those are the facts of the matter. We are working incredibly hard to try to resolve the issues for Mr McRae and, in fact, we are in negotiations with him about all these issues on a daily basis. People from the department, and the district director in that area, are engaged in attempting to resolve the issues for Mr McRae, as we speak. To

be honest, I do not think it is helpful for this issue to be politicised, in light of the facts that I have outlined to the house today.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**Mr C.J. Barnett** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, member for Cottesloe!

**Mr M. McGowan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I think that grievance is finished.