

PAYROLL TAX RELIEF

510. Mr C.J. BARNETT to the Treasurer:

I refer the Treasurer to revelations in *The Australian Financial Review* late last year that former Labor Premier Brian Burke and former Labor minister Julian Grill had a direct influence on the Government's decision to grant payroll tax relief to Western Australian companies.

- (1) When did the Treasurer's chief of staff first meet with Mr Burke and/or Mr Grill to discuss payroll tax relief for their clients?
- (2) On how many other occasions did either Mr Burke or Mr Grill meet with the Treasurer's chief of staff to discuss this issue?
- (3) When was the Treasurer first made aware that his chief of staff was meeting with Mr Burke and/or Mr Grill on this matter; and did he condone those meetings?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

- (1)-(3) It would be very interesting to know whether the Leader of the Opposition thought that the Government's decision on that matter was the right decision. I first ask the Leader of the Opposition whether he thinks that the decision made by the Government on that occasion was the right decision.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Answer the question.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Is it true that the Leader of the Opposition described this decision as a victory for business?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Answer the question, of which you were given notice.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition does not appear to want to be accountable. However, I can assert to this House that the Leader of the Opposition supported the decision to grant payroll tax relief. He obviously viewed it as the right decision. He described it as a victory for business. I have another question for the Leader of the Opposition.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the standing order relating to relevance. Answers must be relevant to questions. This is not the time for ministers to ask questions of members on this side of the House. Question time is for us to ask ministers questions and to try to get some honest answers.

The SPEAKER: The standing order clearly states that the minister's answer must be relevant to the question asked. I think that, at this stage, the answer remains as such.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr E.S. RIPPER: It would appear from the Leader of the Opposition's question that he thinks meeting with Mr Grill is a terrible thing. Is it true that the Leader of the Opposition met with Mr Grill about this issue?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Answer the question.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I assert that the Leader of the Opposition met with Mr Grill about this very issue. There is a word that describes this sort of behaviour, and that word is "hypocrisy". That is what we see here. The question is based on a false premise. The Government's decision was made in response to representations from the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the accountants organisation, CPA Australia. That was the basis on which the Government made the decision about payroll tax relief.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to resurrect an issue that was adequately and fully canvassed in the newspapers before Christmas, he must have very little with which to run at the moment. I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition go to the parliamentary library and look at the newspaper clippings from last year. He will find all the information that he needs, but he will not find the false premise of his question. That is because the Government's decision was the right decision and based on representations from the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CPA Australia.