

OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION - PREMIER'S MEETING WITH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

Before I ask my question, I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of students from the South Bunbury Primary School and also members of the South Perth Country Women's Association. Welcome to Parliament House.

Yesterday in question time the Premier inadvertently revealed that he had had a private meeting with three government members of the Education and Health Standing Committee, which is currently investigating the proposed changes to the years 11 and 12 curriculum. At this meeting he discussed the government's handling of the government's OBE issue, including how the issue could be resolved.

- (1) Is the Premier aware that standing orders clearly prescribe that committee members are not to disclose details of committee deliberations until that information has been reported to the Assembly and is he aware that these standing orders exist to protect the integrity and independence of committee investigations?
- (2) Can the Premier categorically guarantee that there was no discussion of the committee's deliberations or possible recommendations during his meeting?
- (3) In the interests of open and accountable government, will the Premier table a complete report on all the matters that were discussed at this meeting?
- (4) Will the Premier concede that his meeting with government members of the committee has seriously compromised the perception of the independence of the committee and its report?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I also welcome the South Bunbury Primary School students, especially as we are discussing educational issues.

- (1)-(4) Nothing that happened in my discussions with members of the committee compromised the independence of the committee. I recollect that yesterday in question time I made no reference to a meeting. Where did the Leader of the Opposition get that idea from?

Mr P.D. Omodei: You made no reference at all to a meeting with the members -

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: In question time I did not.

Mr P.D. Omodei: So you didn't have a meeting? Did you have a meeting or didn't you have a meeting?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: What was the Leader of the Opposition's first question?

Mr P.D. Omodei: It referred to a meeting the Premier had with certain members of the standing committee.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I did not refer to that in question time. It would not have been the reporter from *The West Australian*, who, after speaking to Martin Whitely, then went straight to the Leader of the Opposition's office and told him that one of the committee members reported that I had had a meeting? Is that right? There is a very interesting connection between the opposition and *The West Australian* newspaper.

Mr P.D. Omodei: What matters is that the meeting took place and you compromised the integrity of that committee.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The meeting took place.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Oh, the meeting did take place now?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Yes, but I did not say that in question time yesterday. I was thanking the members of Parliament for their assistance who came to speak to me about that issue.

Mr P.D. Omodei: They came to speak to you but you never had a meeting?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: We did have a meeting. The Leader of the Opposition's question referred to my addressing the issue of a meeting in question time yesterday, which I did not do. I find it very curious that he would be directly informed by the reporter of *The West Australian*. I like the way journalistic integrity exists in the reporting of politics these days, where the newspaper works hand in hand with the opposition. It is great. I like it because it helps to bring out more of the debate and so on. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could just employ the reporters to sit in his office. That would make things a lot easier. Anyway, we had a meeting. It was a very constructive meeting. Because those three members are on that committee, they have been the contact point for people concerned about this issue. Certainly the member for Wanneroo has raised the issue of

OBE with me separately. I have had several discussions with the member for Bassendean. The chairman said to me that there was a lot of concern that we need to focus on and get resolved, and I think that is good.

I heard the responses to this issue that were put yesterday. The questions have all been answered about what happened at the meeting and whether there was any question of breach of privilege. There was not. What is the Leader of the Opposition's argument? Is he suggesting that I am seeking or have sought to influence the outcome of the committee's deliberations?

Mr C.J. Barnett: You didn't discuss the deliberations at all?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: No, not the findings. Conversely, is the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that -

Mr P.D. Omodei: You didn't realise they were members of the Education and Health Standing Committee?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I did know that. Conversely, is the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that those members tried to influence me in the way I was addressing the issue of OBE?

Mr B.J. Grylls: Of course that's what they were trying to do.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: As good members of Parliament who had a specific -

Mr B.J. Grylls: The three members of the committee and the other members were not allowed to attend that committee.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Other members did not approach me about it. Tut, tut. I can give the Leader of the Opposition an assurance that there was no breach of privilege and there was no untoward conduct; nothing along those lines. I am hopeful that as a result of the changes -

Dr E. Constable: "Ask me; I'm the government"!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: One of the issues that the member finds so desperately frustrating is that the opposition is not in government. I understand that frustration, but members opposite must not read into every activity some sort of conspiracy against the good of the common people. It is not there.

I have spoken to a lot of people. I have spoken to union representatives and I have spoken to the subject association representatives. Thirty minutes ago I spoke to Mike Fazio, the president of the Geography Teachers Association. I apologised to him that I did not engage him or his association in the discussion I had with the people from the subject associations in my office. It was not a deliberate act of omission. They were not invited. I apologised to him. I expressed my desire to make sure that these changes -

Mr J.H.D. Day: The spin doctors forgot about geography.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: It is amazing that OBE is all about education but there are people who are so rich and deep in the response they make to every issue that comes up! The Leader of the Opposition is one of them. The intellect that he shows in response to these issues is just awe-inspiring.

I have spoken to Mike Fazio about this issue. I want to make sure that the geography teachers represented by his association are assured that the government is taking their concerns seriously so that it addresses their concerns and makes sure that the implementation of outcomes-based education and the new courses of study for years 11 and 12 goes well. That is my job. I want to do that. I am grateful for the support that I have had from members of Parliament trying to make sure of that. That is something that the Leader of the Opposition will never have to worry about.