

MOORA RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE — HON DARREN WEST — COMMENTS

Statement

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [10.09 pm]: On a number of occasions in this place I have attempted to get to the bottom of this issue, having raised it previously. Yesterday, I placed on Hon Darren West's seat in the house the statutory declarations from the two councillors involved so that he could be fully aware of the content of the statements made within these sworn documents. However, this is an issue of vital importance to both regional Western Australia and the transparency and accountability of this house, and I will continue to persevere. I will expand on these facts, but essentially the following is the background of my concerns.

I have it on good authority that during discussions at a Western Australian Local Government Association function on 5 April 2018, Hon Darren West provided commitments to two Moora shire councillors regarding Moora Residential College. Specifically, I am advised that Mr West provided assurance that he would arrange an independent assessor to assess the residential college with a view to obtaining a quote and that he would arrange for \$500 000 if that was the amount quoted to repair the college. For obvious reasons, the two shire councillors are keen for Hon Darren West to keep his commitment in this regard. However, to this date I have been unable to secure from the member a confirmation of his commitments. Twice recently, on 12 April and 9 May 2018, I asked questions in this place of the Minister for Education and Training about the commitments just mentioned as provided by Hon Darren West. Essentially, the minister answered that she had indeed asked Mr West whether he had provided such commitments and that he said that he did not make such commitments. Additionally, I raised the same matter in my recent budget reply speech and invited Hon Darren West to comment on the matter. However, Hon Darren West has not availed himself of the opportunity under standing order 40 to place on the record in this place his version and provide a personal explanation in reply to the statements I made on Thursday, 14 June 2018.

On the surface, this may appear to be a mere squabble over who said what in relation to commitments regarding Moora Residential College. In fact, this is an extremely serious matter for the following reasons. Firstly, the potential closure of Moora Residential College is of utmost importance to regional Western Australia. Members on both sides are well aware of the significant public interest this issue has generated. It is therefore vitally important for the house to know whether or not Mr West did commit to the claims assessment and repairs. Secondly, the shire councillors concerned were so entirely certain of the member's commitments to them that they were prepared to, and did indeed, provide statutory declarations to that effect, the gravity of which is a point to which I will return.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon JIM CHOWN: Thirdly and finally in this regard, honesty in this place is fundamental to the transparency and integrity that we owe to the public we represent. To this end, I quote, and agree entirely with, Hon Sue Ellery's remarks made in this place on 17 March 2016 when she rightly stated —

Secrecy, obfuscation, avoidance and inaccuracy, whether deliberate or not, and dishonesty, are in fact the enemies of our parliamentary democracy.

Until such time as Hon Darren West provides an explanation from his perspective regarding the assertions of the conversation, the only evidence of what occurred are answers to my parliamentary questions provided by Hon Sue Ellery and the two statutory declarations, the content of which I have read into the public record in their entirety. Those are clearly in stark contradiction to each other and, quite clearly, both cannot be correct. As I have previously advised, the making of a statutory declaration is a serious undertaking. The making of a false statutory declaration is a crime potentially resulting in imprisonment or, at the very least, a substantial fine. Indeed, one of the councillors sought legal advice prior to her making the statutory declaration. Substantial weight must go to the evidence of those statutory declarations, particularly recognising the fact that not one but two statutory declarations were signed by two separate individuals, both of whom hold responsible positions as shire councillors and both of whom are aware of the penalty for making a false declaration.

We have an obvious conflict regarding the statutory declarations and the answers provided by Hon Sue Ellery. Her answers relied on the information given to her by Hon Darren West. The answers provided by Hon Sue Ellery are diametrically opposed to the recollection of the two shire councillors. The Leader of the House was not present during the conversations, so she can base her answers only on the information provided to her by Hon Darren West. It is my view that this house and the public deserve to hear directly from Hon Darren West about what, if any, commitments he did or did not make on 5 April regarding Moora Residential College.