

FIONA STANLEY HOSPITAL — SERVICES PRIVATISATION

135. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the ABC evening news on 8 March 2011, in which the Leader of the Opposition was asked about his knowledge of and involvement in the business case for the new Fiona Stanley Hospital and the policy for contracting out services when he was Deputy Premier and Treasurer. He said that what might have happened deep in the bureaucracy during Labor's period of government is not relevant, but that what is relevant is the future and the commitment that he made to not support privatisation of public health services.

It seems that the Leader of the Opposition is doing a backflip in trying to conveniently distance himself from his own policy because of pressure from the unions. Can the minister clarify the previous government's policy on the contracting out of health services at Fiona Stanley Hospital?

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I call you for the first time today—formally.

People might not like the question. People in this place still get to ask questions whether other people like it or not.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Mr Speaker, it is good that they would like to hear an answer to this question. The reason they would like to hear an answer is that this new union, called one voice, is —

Mr R.H. Cook: No, it is not!

Dr K.D. HAMES: What is it called?

Mr R.H. Cook: United Voice.

Dr K.D. HAMES: It is called United Voice. I thought it was called one voice because every time the member opens his mouth, all I hear is Dave Kelly. I was amazed to hear both the Leader of the Opposition and his deputy on TV talking about the contracting out of services, particularly for Fiona Stanley Hospital, and saying different things. I will go through what each of them said in turn.

First, the Leader of the Opposition said that what might have happened deep within the bureaucracy during Labor's period of government is not relevant. Members, let us explore how deep within the levels of bureaucracy this decision was made to contract out.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Why don't you read out the sentence that you are hanging it on? The sentence that you are hanging it on doesn't even justify your case. It is not in the same vein. What does it mean?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will cover it. I will cover it when I get to his comments; just be patient.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Read out the sentence!

Dr K.D. HAMES: No. I need to go back a bit, for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, to talk about his personal policy on the contracting out of services to the private sector that he initiated when the Labor Party was in government. In December 2002, the WA Treasury launched "Partnerships for Growth: Policies and Guidelines for Public Private Partnerships in Western Australia". The current Leader of the Opposition put this document on the Department of Treasury and Finance's website. Allens Arthur Robinson, which is a very highly regarded law firm in this state, did a very detailed assessment of what that policy meant for contracting out. In the document, the now Leader of the Opposition referred to the sorts of things that could be privatised and, in particular, the opportunities to privatise backroom services, and, particularly, those within the health system. The document refers to how good it is to contract out to the private sectors in those particular areas. That document goes into great detail on the policy and how it led to exactly what the current government is doing at the Fiona Stanley Hospital. The model that the government is using to contract out those services at Fiona Stanley Hospital exactly matches the policy that was put out by the then Treasurer when the Labor Party was in government.

Although the "Partnerships for Growth" document was released in 2002, what about the business case that I tabled last week? Was the business case merely a backroom bureaucratic document or do members think the Treasurer might have had something to do with it? The guidelines of the 2002 policy required that any proposal for a public-private partnership for contracting out of those services had to go before the Treasurer's committee and to cabinet. The Leader of the Opposition, who said that he would not have seen this and that this was backroom bureaucracy, was the very one who sat at the head of the Expenditure Review Committee and made a decision on supporting the business case that I tabled last week. He would then have taken that policy to cabinet and had cabinet tick off on it. The Leader of the Opposition absolutely would have seen it.

Mr E.S. Ripper: We never had a policy of privatisation, and we don't have one now!

Dr K.D. HAMES: All the Leader of the Opposition need do is read the 2002 document. I am happy to table the “Partnerships for Growth” document for the balance of the day’s sitting, because it makes a good assessment of the former Treasurer’s policy and what it means, and what government can do—in fact, what it should do—in contracting out services. Contrary to the Leader of the Opposition making the point that that was not his policy at the time, every other state managed by the Labor Party in Australia has followed exactly the same policy that the Leader of the Opposition put out and they have contracted out services in the same way that this government has.

Mr E.S. Ripper: So, what are you doing? Are you arguing that we will not bring the services back in-house? Is that what you’re arguing? What is the point of this?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will read this bit. I am saying to the Leader of the Opposition that although I find it difficult to imagine both the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in leotards, their backflips are amazing! When the Labor Party was in government, it had a policy of contracting out services in public hospitals.

Mr E.S. Ripper: So, you agree that we are going to bring the services back in-house and that we mean what we say?

Dr K.D. HAMES: No. I am saying that the Leader of the Opposition has done a backflip on what he said when he was in government. Far from what the Leader of the Opposition said to the public of Western Australia on television, he should apologise to the public. If the Leader of the Opposition said in Parliament what he said on television, we would call on him to withdraw the statement. What the Leader of the Opposition said is provably and blatantly incorrect. The Labor Party might have changed its policy now and the Leader of the Opposition might be saying how wonderful it is because he wants everyone to know that the Labor Party has changed its policy, but what he said about it being done by a backroom bureaucracy is clearly and provably wrong.

I want to get to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. This comes to the point that the Leader of the Opposition makes about this statement, because he has got a different interpretation from that of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I know that that is what the Leader of the Opposition based his statement on. The business case for the Fiona Stanley Hospital was a requirement of the document that I tabled last week, and it can be interpreted in two ways. The document states —

Private sector opportunities shall be identified where they are complementary to the objectives and the hospital can then support the provision of an efficient integrated health service.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition says that that means that when a public hospital is built, it is then possible to build a private hospital next door; that is, the Joondalup model. It is possible to have private services next door. But we are talking about Fiona Stanley Hospital, next door to which will be a large private hospital providing all of the private services required for that whole region. This was specifically about private services being provided in a public hospital—nothing more, nothing less—and the government was committed to that as per the Fiona Stanley business case, as per approved by the committee managed by Treasury —

Mr R.H. Cook: You are reading the wrong page! You have got the wrong page, you idiot!

Withdrawal of Remark

The SPEAKER: I suggest that the member for Kwinana withdraw his comment.

Mr R.H. COOK: I happily withdraw the comment.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr K.D. HAMES: This was committed to by the government in cabinet, and clearly the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition was blatantly false.

Tabling of Paper

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Health indicated that he would table the document.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Point of Order

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I do not think it is parliamentary for the Minister for Health to allege that I have made a blatantly false statement. The use of the word “blatantly” implies a deliberate falsehood, and that is not true.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I would very much like the Leader of the Opposition to quote the section of the standing orders he is referring to, because that has been used many times in this house before —

Mrs C.A. Martin: He called him a liar; that’s what he did!

The SPEAKER: I do not need the member for Kimberley’s advice; I do not need anybody else’s advice. I will give the call to the member for Collie–Preston; I will not take any points of order.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 22 March 2011]

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Mr Joe Francis; Mr Roger Cook; Speaker; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson
