



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 18 November 1998

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—ONP) (6.19 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'That' and insert the following—

'this House expresses its concerns that local members cannot approach school management directly over matters of concern and calls on the Minister to allow that free flow of information.'."

I ask members on the Government side of the House to cast their minds back to when they were not in Government. I am sure that, at one time or another, one or two of them may have had some difficulty in communicating with members of their community because of the perceived fact that they were not speaking to a Government member.

I know for a fact that in my community on the tablelands, which is a remote and regional community—and the difficulty in accessing the tablelands because of the Gillies Highway and the Kuranda Range makes it even more remote—when I speak to local members in the community, including school principals, they are always a little bit reluctant to speak because of this so-called protocol within the Public Service, which I believe goes something along the lines that one must never go against the Government of the day. Sometimes, principals, P & Cs or whomever they may be—in some cases, police officers—do not want to go against the Government; they just have a problem that needs to be addressed.

Mr Reeves: P & Cs can help.

Mr NELSON: I am not saying that P & Cs cannot help; I am saying that there is a perception among them that, in this case, if they talk to a One Nation member, that might have some impact on their school or what they receive for the school. I am serious. There is that perception.

Mr Reeves: It doesn't apply only to One Nation.

Mr NELSON: That is what I am saying. I know that the members for Mansfield and Townsville are first-time members of this House. However, I am sure that if they spoke to other members who have been—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will address the Chair.

Mr NELSON: I am sure that if those members spoke to other Government members of the House who have been in Opposition, they would realise that, no matter who is in Government, there is this difficulty and departments are sometimes very reluctant to act. That is my concern and I assure everyone in this House that it does happen.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr NELSON: No, maybe I should have emphasised the point more that the principals can use the P & C to address these issues.

Mr Dalgleish: What about the hospitals?

Mr NELSON: That is a good point.

Mr Feldman: P & Cs don't want to lose their principals.

Mr NELSON: Yes, P & Cs do not like to lose their principals. I am not saying that there is this big vendetta campaign out there and that the Government will go around sacking principals if they do this,

that and the other. However, there certainly is something within the department that makes people think that if they go to their local members and speak out, they will be chastised, as they have been in the past. I am not saying that that happens only under a Labor Government; I know that happens under all Governments. I am saying that this should be stopped, especially as the increase in the number of Independent members in the House and the advent of One Nation in the Queensland Parliament indicate that there is a broader spread of political ideals in the community. Therefore, they must be represented in relation to the departments. There must never be a feeling in the community that people cannot go to their local member on issues, regardless of whether they are principals, school teachers, police officers, members of the local council, or whomever. No matter what position people hold, they must never feel that they cannot go to their local member and have a chat about an issue that they believe is of great concern, especially within their area of control.

One recent example relates to Malanda High School. I was gravely concerned that it was going to miss out——

Mr Reeves: Peter Beattie went to Atherton High's speech night.

Mr NELSON: Of course he did. I do not see the relevance. If the member made a good interjection, I would accept it. I am talking about Malanda High School. Malanda and Atherton are a fair distance apart. The member should have a look at a map. I assure him that Malanda and Atherton are not neighbouring areas.

The point is that this issue arose in relation to Malanda High School. I would like to see the situation that at no time is anyone restricted from going to their local member or even that there is a perceived restriction. That is why I have moved this amendment tonight and I hope that it gets the support of the House.
