



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 15 March 2000

LIFE EDUCATION CENTRES

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.10 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"That all words after 'Parliament' be deleted with a view to substituting the following words:

'commends the Government for a responsible and forward-looking approach to education in general, and drug education in particular.'

Honourable members who have previously spoken in this debate have spoken on the basis that there is absolutely no doubt that Life Education is a successful program. I have an open mind on that issue. Bertrand Russell said that, when the experts differ, it would be a wise thing for a wise individual to withhold judgment. Let me read to the House an extract from a learned research report by authors Hawthorne, Garrard and Dunt from the National Centre for Health Program Evaluation from the University of Melbourne. The abstract of that report states—

"This study examined the short-term public health effects on 3000 11- and 12-year-old students, of whom 1700 were exposed to 5 consecutive years of the programme. The other 1300 students were not exposed to the programme. After controlling for the known predictors of social drug use there was no evidence that Life Education students, when compared with students receiving conventional school-based drug education, were less likely to have smoked, were less likely to have drunk or were less likely to have used analgesics. Indeed, the evidence suggested that Life Education-students were slightly more likely to use these substances ..."

I table that learned document. The debate was enlivened in 1998 when Deakin University's coordinator of addiction studies, Stephen Wallace, said that statistics showed about 5,000 children across Australia had started using drugs as a result of the Life Education program. I table that report also. I withhold judgment on this subject, but the proposition on which honourable members opposite have based their whole argument is one which is very far from proven.

The motion tonight is from the architect of the Leading Schools program, one facet of which was the proposition that school-based decision making was the way to go. Yet here he is advocating that there should be a monolithic program determined by the Minister in a ministerial office to be run by an organisation based on the Gold Coast to cover the whole State. If he had his way, there would be no choice; this is the one to be funded. I would have thought it would be better for schools to make their judgments in light of the available evidence as to what worked, their own experience as to what had worked and that they should choose those programs that they wished.

After all, it was then Minister Quinn who himself—and the member who seconded the motion is apparently unaware of this—said in 1997 that it would be a very good idea to have a new health and physical education syllabus and that Life Education could be funded in order to fill the gap until the health and physical education syllabus was on line. We now have the health and physical education syllabus in accordance with these papers from the ministerial council.

Let me tell the House what the ministerial council—that is all Ministers in this country, State and Federal, Liberal and Labor—had to say. They said—

"Drug education is best taught in the context of the school health curriculum. Drug education in schools should be conducted by the teacher of the health curriculum. Drug education programs and resources should be selected to complement the role of the classroom teacher with selected external resources enhancing and not replacing that role."

That is what the working papers of the ministerial council had to say.

When talking about the Life Education program itself, I refer to a letter from one Stan Collard, a gentleman who is well known to honourable members opposite. This letter was sent to the local Life Education organisations. It says—

"The agreement signed with the State Government ... represents, for this year, approximately 50% of the educators' salaries."

Did they get 50% of the educators' salaries? Several units of Life Education have complained to me that this is not what happened. Another paragraph further down in that letter states—

"Under the Franchise Agreement it is a requirement to present the programme as directed. All centres are required to supply every child with a workbook and every teacher with a teacher's manual.

...

"Committees that do not supply workbooks will not receive the full subsidy."

The consequence of this is that some money was "clawed back", to use the phrase of one of the units.

Time expired.
