

Hampton Senior High School — School Bus — Adjournment Debate

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [5.21 pm]: Today I received an email from a very concerned member of the Hampton Senior High School community. It is not very often that one gets a chance to bring a community concern straight to the Parliament and to put it on the public record. However, I thought that it was important to do that in this case because this is an ongoing saga that the school community has every right to be very angry about. The first question that came to my mind when I read about this issue was, “What does it take to get a school bus?” Anyone who has had an association with a school, particularly a high school, knows that it is very important for the school to have access to transport so that the school can provide greater opportunities for the students. This is the sad and sorry saga of a parents and citizens association that has gone to a great deal of effort to raise money to lease a school bus. In October 2008, members of the association decided to allocate some \$7 500 per annum for the lease of a new bus. It is now towards the end of November 2009 and the school still does not have a school bus. There is something drastically wrong when it takes more than a year to secure a school bus, especially when the money is available and has been put aside. The school community has desperately sought this resource for the benefit of the students. The parents of the students of Hampton Senior High School have been in contact with Martin Whitely, who has also taken up the issue on their behalf. The Minister for Education wrote a letter to Mr Whitely about this matter on 8 September. The minister said in that correspondence that one of the reasons why the school does not have the school bus is that it is necessary to ensure that the WA government did not lose its ability to claim the goods and services tax paid on all leased school buses to the Australian Taxation Office.

This really is an issue that we have to get to the bottom of, because quite clearly it not only applies to Hampton Senior High School, but also concerns, I suppose, all leased school buses. According to my notes, the minister stated that if this issue had not been resolved—that is, the ability of the Western Australian government to claim goods and services tax paid on all leased school buses to the Australian Taxation Office—it may have resulted in an additional cost to the Western Australian government. That statement implies that the issue has been resolved, and one would then assume that if the issue had been resolved, clearly Hampton Senior High School would have received either its bus or the authority to lease a new school bus, but clearly that is not the case.

This community is concerned because it is getting towards the end of the school year, and when the P&C meets on 30 November—later this month—it wants some certainty and clarity about where it stands. I do not doubt for a moment that it wants to be able to begin the next school year with a brand-new leased school bus so that the school can provide all the opportunities that the students in that school so rightly deserve.

On 7 October 2009, the parents’ association wrote to Mr Frank Wee from the finance section of the Department of Education about the matter of the Hampton Senior High School bus lease. Its letter reads —

It is with much sadness that I have to send this letter to ask how much longer do the students of Hampton Senior High School have to wait before they acquire a bus?

On the **8th September, 2008** the P&C Association of Hampton Senior High School approved an annual contribution of sum \$7,500 towards the lease of a new bus.

A year has past and the school still does not have a bus!

The letter also states that the P&C is desperately awaiting a resolution to this matter, and that it does not want to waste another year, which is fair enough. Of course—typical bureaucracy—Mr Frank Wee emailed a reply to the member of the P&C stating that he had to transfer the correspondence across to another officer—Mr David Munrowd-Harris, the manager of asset services—for a response, and so on and so forth.

It is clear to me that this very well intentioned school and the parents and citizens group, who have the best interests of the students in mind, are simply just getting caught up in this huge bureaucratic merry-go-round, and so on and so forth. I say enough is enough! The reason I have brought this issue into the chamber is that I want to put the education minister and the bureaucracy on notice that I will personally make sure that I do everything in my power for these people who have done the right thing and have waited for so long for something as simple as a lease on a new school bus. I will continue to raise this matter in this place on their behalf because I believe that they have done the right thing, but they have been let down by the bureaucracy. They have been let down by a number of faceless people, none of whom wants to accept the responsibility of taking an issue, dealing with it, finalising it and tying it up to make sure that a positive end result is delivered to the people who so desperately need it. We see this happen time and again.

I make the point again that what has happened to the good citizens of this school community is unacceptable. They should be entitled to lease their school bus. If there are outstanding GST issues, they should certainly not take a year to resolve. I would be surprised if this is the first case of a school ever leasing a school bus. Surely the issues relating to lease arrangements would have been sorted out years ago. I cannot understand why there

has been a delay of 12 months. I will put the minister and the agency on notice in respect of this matter because I think it is very, very important.

International Men's Day — Adjournment Debate

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [5.32 pm]: Believe it or not, I rise with some degree of enthusiasm, notwithstanding the fact that it has been a long week. I recognise the time; I do not intend to keep members for too long. I thought it would be remiss of me not to take the opportunity to speak given that it is International Men's Day. Mr President, you may recall that in an earlier speech I made in this place I noted that we have a Minister for Child Protection and a Minister for Women's Interests yet no minister looking after men's interests. I take this opportunity this afternoon to speak about International Men's Day.

This is an occasion to celebrate men's achievements and contributions, in particular their contributions to community, family, marriage and child care.

Hon Liz Behjat: That should take about 30 seconds.

The PRESIDENT: Order! That is an unruly interjection.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: This day was designed to focus on men's and boy's health issues, improving gender relations, promoting gender equality and highlighting positive male role models. Obviously I have only a limited amount of time to speak, so I will limit my comments to the final two areas—promotion of gender equality and highlighting positive male role models.

Firstly, it should be obvious that men and women are innately different. There is a push by some to erase gender distinctions. Professor Steven Goldberg, chairman of the Department of Sociology at the City College of New York, has written a book with the provocative title *Why Men Rule: A Theory of Male Dominance*. In the book he debunks much of the feminist mythology surrounding the issue of differences between males and females. Goldberg maintains that although males and females are different in their genetic and hormonally driven behaviour, this does not mean that one sex is superior or inferior to another. Each gender has different strengths and weaknesses. Goldberg writes —

There is not, nor has there ever been, any society that even remotely failed to associate authority and leadership in suprafamilial areas with the male. There are no borderline cases.

Feminist theorists maintain that socialisation is a primary reason why males have dominated the world's cultures, but Goldberg counters —

If socialisation alone explains why societies are patriarchal, there should be any number of societies in which leadership and authority are associated with women, and one should not have to invoke examples of non-patriarchal societies that exist only in myth and literature.

In my view, rather than competing for superiority, we should celebrate and embrace the differences between males and females. Let us respect our differences and teach our future generations that each gender has intrinsic worth, importance and usefulness. This way we shall ensure that women and men will experience equality in their responsibilities, careers, family time and opportunities.

I move to the second area—recognising positive male role models. Our sportsmen are often targeted by the media as significant male role models. Although this may be justified to some degree, I do not think that we should give drug-taking, female-abusing sporting heroes the honour of having an influence on our children. There will never be a more important role model in a child's life than his or her father. I will now tell members about some of the interesting research that has come across my desk in recent months. Considering that today is International Men's Day, it seems a good time to bring this research to the attention of members. As a father of five, my eyes are naturally drawn to the research pertaining to fatherhood. In 2007, Dr Jessica Ball released a research paper for the Public Health Agency of Canada. She found that when fathers were involved in raising children, the positive health outcomes included enhanced self-confidence, fewer accidental and premature deaths, less substance abuse, less distress, greater wellbeing, marital stability and happiness, and fewer hospital admissions.

Closer to home, an article that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on 18 August 2008 reported —

University of Newcastle academics have found children copy their father's diets and exercise regimes and will now trial a world first study — *Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids* — funded by the Hunter Medical Research Institute.

The six-month study follows evidence that children mimic their fathers over their mothers when it comes to healthy eating and exercise.

Associate Professor Philip Morgan, who heads the new program, saw astounding results in a previous trial involving 165 overweight children.

He found children who lost the most weight had fathers who were engaged in the new eating and exercise plan.

...

“Fathers influence the food and physical activity habits in the home through their behaviours, attitudes and approach to food and eating, and act as a role model to their children.”

Professor Morgan said mothers, as primary care givers, were easier to inform but when fathers make changes the whole family becomes healthier.

Last Tuesday, a very interesting article appeared in *The Courier-Mail* in which Dr Bruce Robinson, coordinator of the Fathering Project at the University of Western Australia, was reported as saying —

“In general, mothers tend to spend their time worrying about the kids. ‘Have you got clean knickers, have you eaten your vegetables, have you brushed your teeth?’. Whereas dads tend to be a bit more laid-back,” Robinson says.

“Those differences are good, so long as they are two good parts of one thing.

Diane A. Sears is the author of a book on fatherhood and men’s issues entitled *In Search of Fatherhood: Transcending Boundaries*. She sums it up beautifully when she writes —

Our sons need Fathers. Men help the young males of our society successfully navigate the journey from childhood to manhood. It takes a man to teach a boy how to be a man. It takes a Man to provide our sons with the positive affirmation that only a Father can give—positive affirmation that our sons so desperately seek and need to receive from an adult male. It takes a Man to prepare the young males of our society for their future roles as husbands, fathers, and productive members of our global village once they reach the age of maturity. A young man’s relationship with his father determines, to a large degree, how he will raise his own children.

Our daughters need Fathers. Fathers shape our daughters’ first images of men. Fathers shape the decisions that our daughters make when choosing a career and choosing a mate. Fathers shape our daughters’ perception of their self-worth and their place in the world. It takes a Man to provide our daughters with the positive affirmation that only a Father can give—positive affirmation that our daughters so desperately seek and need to receive from an adult male. A young woman’s relationship with her father determines, to a large degree, how she will raise her own children.

Men are the glue that holds our families, our communities, and our world together.

In researching for this speech, I found numerous studies and research by child development laboratories and universities the world over that all say the same thing. The involvement of dads in their children’s upbringing and lives is very powerful, and I would go so far as to say that it would go a long way towards solving many of our society’s problems and issues that manifest in antisocial and dangerous, risk-taking behaviours. They are problems and issues that we spend much time trying to legislate for with a view to minimising. If something is so good for our children and has the potential to reduce obesity, mental health issues, future marital breakdown and drug use, and has the power to help our children reach their potential and feel good about themselves, should we not be doing what we can to help nurture and support dads and encourage them to have as much involvement in the rearing and lives of their children as possible? As we celebrate International Men’s Day today, let us not forget the issue of interdependence that I have spoken about before. If men are trained and supported to be real men and to uphold women as equals in the home and the workplace, and if men are trained and supported to be real fathers and to uphold their children with all the benefits I have just mentioned, the outcome will be better for women and children and for society as a whole.