Opposition Needs to Get Informed

The Attorney-General Chris Burns said the Opposition showed a stunning display of laziness and lack of understanding during yesterday’s debate over the Government’s tough new youth laws.

“The shadow Attorney-General Jodeen Carney had not even bothered to read the legislation properly or avail herself of a briefing. She was not even aware what constituted a serious offence under the new legislation,” Dr Burns said.

“This is Law 101. Not even a first year law student would have made such an embarrassing mistake. I’m absolutely stunned.

Dr Burns said Jodeen Carney then went on to attack the language used in the legislation – obviously not understanding the clear intent of the new laws to make parents more accountable for their children’s actions.

“As a lawyer she knows the word ‘may’ is used in lots of legislation. It’s done so the laws can be tailored to meet a range of circumstances,” he said.

“Jodeen Carney has attacked the new laws. But why should anyone listen to her when she doesn’t do her research and tries to play word games with such an important issue.

“If Jodeen Carney is having trouble understanding the legislation, I again urge her and other members of the Opposition to seek a briefing from my office.”

Dr Burns said the Government’s tough new youth justice laws are designed to make parents’ more accountable for their children’s action, prevent juveniles from accessing diversion more than twice and help parents develop better parenting skills.

“The community is sick and tired of a small number of kids who do the wrong thing. The Government has listened and we are doing something about it,” he said.

“The Opposition should also be 100% behind the new laws.”

**See attached excerpts from Hansard for May 1, 2008**
Ms CARNEY: There is no definition of what a serious offence is, who determines what a serious offence is. Would it not have been better to include, as we have seen in other legislation, particular offences to give clarity to both the people on the street administering this, that being our police officers. Do they determine the definition of serious? Would it not have been better for the courts and police officers and pretty much everyone else to prescribe what is serious and what is not – that is the first point.

Ms CARNEY: Madam Speaker, there are few things more serious than this issue. It is also seriously concerning that members opposite, and I will bet London to a brick that most of them have not even bothered to look at the bill. It is seriously concerning.

Dr BURNS: A point of order; Madam Speaker! We have the shadow Attorney-General who has not even bothered to get a briefing on this legislation. The members opposite here as a Caucus have been briefed. She is just asserting something that is not true. I would question that her own motives at not getting a briefing.

Ms CARNEY: I note the Attorney-General's attempt at making a point of order. Apparently, a briefing was obtained by some members opposite – well, bully for them. I do not seem to have the same sort of difficulties. It is a reasonably straight …

Ms SCRYMGOUR: How arrogant.

Ms CARNEY (Araluen): Madam Speaker, before lunch I referred to the difference between what the government said this legislation will do and what the legislation actually says. I will make some other comments in relation to it, but however there is something I need to correct. Before lunch I said there was no definition of serious offence, of course there is a definition of serious offence in the act.

Dr BURNS: The member for Araluen also boldly asserted when she stood up here to begin with before lunch that there was no definition of ‘serious offence’. She stood here and said that no definition of what a serious offence is. Well after lunch I do not know who rang right after lunch, someone must have rung her up: ‘Look, I heard you on the parliamentary broadcast and this is what you have said. You are a lawyer you should know that serious offences are described very clearly in the youth justice regulations and there is a whole range there under three sections 54, 55(1), 62, 66(2)’. I could read for the next five to 10 minutes all the serious offences that are prescribed in there.

The thing I would say to the member for Araluen who came in here when I suggested that she did not get a briefing as neither did any of the members of the CLP, she scoffed at that as if to say I do not need a briefing. How dare you say to me I need a briefing. I say to you, member for Araluen, you do need a briefing because even I knew. I have been Attorney-General now for about five or six months. As soon as you said that I knew it was wrong. You should have known and you could have asked that question in a briefing and you could have avoided embarrassment. You could have avoided the embarrassment of having to come in here, after lunch after someone else had given you the rub that what you said had been wrong. You could have avoided the embarrassment but you did not.