



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRIVILEGE

SPEECH

Wednesday, 27 May 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Wednesday, 27 May 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Pyne, Chris, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (4.57 pm)—Under standing order 51, I wish to raise a matter of privilege. Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, to me this matter represents a prima facie case of breach of privilege, and I ask you to ask the Speaker to take the appropriate action to give precedence to a motion to refer this matter to the House of Representatives Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests. Repeatedly in this House in the last sitting weeks, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have sought to denigrate members of the opposition who support projects, grants or programs that are available to organisations, groups, associations or businesses in their own electorates.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, members of parliament have a duty to represent their voters. Community groups and others expect their local MPs and other local representatives to write letters of support, to seek appointments with ministers, to meet with ministers and to lobby on behalf of their community organisations, their sporting groups, their local associations and local businesses to support job, infrastructure and other grants and programs that go into our electorates. That is true for members on both sides of the House, whether we are Liberal, Labor, National or even Independent.

Members of the opposition are being hindered in doing so. They are being inhibited from doing their work because of the personal denigration by members of the government—

Mr Price interjecting—

Mr Hayes interjecting—

Mr PYNE—You think it is funny; it is actually really serious. You think it is tremendously amusing. Your interjection was, 'Come over to this side of the House,' so in fact what you are saying is that we should all be Labor MPs—which is exactly the point I am making. That is exactly the point, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I am making. Members are being hindered, and I personally feel inhibited in doing my work as a member of parliament, in writing letters of support and in working for community organisations, associations and businesses so they are able to get access to the programs, grants and other spending that all governments of all political persuasions provide in our electorates.

Members are concerned that they will be denigrated for doing their job. But, more importantly, we are getting feedback on this side of the House that community organisations and others are concerned that their applications will be seen in a different light from those coming from government MPs in government seats. That goes to the very issue of privilege.

Mr Price—Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr PYNE—You cannot call for a point of order on a matter of privilege.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The Chief Government Whip will resume his seat. The member for Sturt is raising a matter of privilege. He has the call.

Mr Price—Treat it seriously!

Mr PYNE—I am treating it seriously. Community organisations, from feedback we are receiving, are concerned that their applications for grants, for programs and for government infrastructure spending will be seen in a different light because they are not being proposed by government members. That goes to the very nub of the breach of privilege. It is contrary to all the traditions of the Westminster system, which we operate under, in which government should be blind as to whether the applications come from Liberal, Labor, National or Independent members of parliament. They should be decided on their merits. It is contrary to the way this parliament has

operated for the last 108 years. It amounts to a prima facie case of the intimidation of members of parliament while carrying out their duties.

I place this matter before the Speaker and ask him to consider it and report back to the House on the implications of this breach of privilege. I ask him to give precedence to a motion for this to be referred to the privileges committee forthwith.