

It's not about voting more opposition in Parliament: Education Minister Heng

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By Satish Cheney | Yahoo! Newsroom



Yahoo! Newsroom/Yahoo! photo - Minister Heng Swee Keat hits back at WP claims.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat hit back swiftly at opposition Workers' Party claims that residents of Punggol East should vote for them to make the PAP "work hard".

"PAP has been working hard to come up with various ways to help Singaporeans even when they was no opposition in Parliament," he told reporters at a community event at Tampines Central Temple.

Referring to WP chief Low Thia Kiang's rally message on Saturday that [people should vote for WP](#) to keep up the pressure on PAP, Minister Heng turned the tables.

"Voters should look at what the various (PAP) MPs have done and contributed in their constituencies and in Parliament," he said.

"And I think they will come to the conclusion that they should vote for the PAP to make the Workers' Party work harder for you".

He also took pains to remind voters of Punggol East that it's "not about voting more opposition into Parliament".

"It's important to understand what this by-election is about. It's about electing the best candidate who can serve the residents of Punggol East," he said, adding that PAP candidate Koh Poh Koon is a "sincere and hardworking man" who understands the needs of residents and will work hard to improve their lives.

Analysts react

However, political observer and former Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong said it isn't exactly comparing apples to apples regarding who voters should select to make the other party "work hard".

"PAP is the governing party and so can make policy, which WP cannot do. When WP talks about delivering a message to PAP, they are not saying that it's to make PAP put in more effort as such, but rather to let PAP know that they've not done enough to address voters' concerns," said Siew.

As to whether voters will be impacted by the Prime Minister's comments that Koh will be appointed to a political office if he wins, Siew said he wouldn't put much weight into it.

"Dr Koh has only been a PAP member for a few weeks, and any talk about higher office is pure speculation. *Even PM Lee's own words were highly qualified*, in terms of waiting until Dr Koh is ready," he said.

Another former Nominated MP and sociologist Pauline Tay-Straughan told *Yahoo! Singapore* that talk about Koh being potentially more than just an MP indicates the strong backing from the party but feels it may not actually impact many Punggol-East voters.

"It may help sway some who are sitting on the fence or help assure those already leaning towards the establishment that the PAP candidate is someone who is right for the job, especially since Koh is a new face in politics," she said.

"And don't forget, he is also running against a WP candidate who has had experience in the Punggol-East ground at the last general election and garnered 41 per cent of the votes," she added.

Media consultant P.N Balji noted that the Prime Minister "might have wanted to show that the PAP is fielding a heavyweight candidate."

Another political analyst, Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University said that the PAP might be announcing their potential plans for Koh in public so as to let Punggol East voters know they are not being short-changed, considering their previous PAP MP, Michael Palmer was Speaker of Parliament.



PAP's Dr Koh distributes flyers to Punggol East residents on Sunday morning.

Meanwhile, PAP candidate Koh also addressed [WP rival Lee Li Lian's claims that as a female voice](#), she would bring something different into Parliament if she were elected.

"Well, I think selecting an MP really is selecting someone to serve the needs of the wide spectrum of the population, so gender shouldn't really play a role," said Dr Koh at a separate walkabout in Punggol East, where he met church-goers outside St Anne's church.

"All MPs should take care of different segments of the demographic equally well, so I think the selection shouldn't be about gender per se," said the colorectal surgeon, 40.

"And I think even at this present moment, we are all trying our best to also take care of different segments: women, children, elderlies and the youths as well".

Dr Koh also said he plans to build a new community centre behind the Rivervale Plaza, on top of a wellness centre for the elderly.



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"We want to put in place more health screening programmes so we can detect diseases earlier, and to do some preventive kind of management for those diseases in the early stages. What we want to do is to leverage on the building of the new CC to in-build some of these programmes and facilities in place," he said.