



# Buswell's meeting snub 'was personal'

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Senior Rudd Government minister Chris Evans has suggested that Troy Buswell might have been excluded from a meeting of fellow State treasurers because of their revulsion at his "personal characteristics" — a veiled reference to the chair-sniffing and bra-snapping antics which cost him the leadership of the WA Liberal party earlier this year.

The claim during question time yesterday was seized on by the Opposition as proof that Kevin Rudd's aim of "co-operative federalism" was a sham.

The meeting, held two weeks ago, was designed as a chance for State treasurers to co-ordinate their strategy when they come to negotiate with the Prime Minister and Treasurer Wayne Swan over new health and education funding deals at the Council of Australian Governments meeting tomorrow and Saturday in Canberra.

But as the country's only Liberal treasurer, Mr Buswell was pointedly not invited. Colin Barnett said the omission showed the Labor States were hatching a plan that would disadvantage WA financially.

Asked about the snub yesterday, Senator Evans said he "would certainly think twice about meeting" Mr Buswell. "I can think of a lot of reasons why you

wouldn't invite Troy Buswell to a meeting — a lot of reasons — because his behaviour has been of less than the required standard," Senator Evans said.

"I would regard it as quite prudent not to invite Mr Buswell to certain meetings — not because he is from WA, not because he is a Liberal, but because of his own personal characteristics that many of us find offensive."

He went on to praise Mr Barnett for his support for a close working relationship with Canberra.

But the criticism of Mr Buswell drew howls of outrage from the Opposition, who accused Senator Evans of "referring disrespectfully" to another MP, which is forbidden under Senate rules.

WA Liberal senator Mathias Cormann said Senator Evans' "partisan" comments and Mr Buswell's ostracism showed Mr Rudd's mantra of the Federal Government working co-operatively with the States was "nothing more than a political slogan without any substance". He called on Mr Rudd to reprimand the State treasurers for excluding Mr Buswell.

Mr Buswell said that if the comments reflected Labor's true attitude to co-operative federalism, they were "particularly unfortunate on the eve of the most important COAG meeting perhaps ever".

A spokesman for Senator Evans said later the comments were nothing more than "good natured banter".



Unsuitable: Chris Evans said Troy Buswell's behaviour 'has been of less than the required standard'.



Excluded: Troy Buswell was not invited to a meeting of State treasurers.