

SENIORS — ASSAULTS AGAINST — POLICE RESOURCES

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [3.10 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be moved forthwith —

That this house demands the McGowan Labor government immediately commit to a substantial increase in additional police officers to help stop the out-of-control violence, especially against vulnerable seniors.

I believe an agreement has been reached.

Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [3.10 pm]: I move —

To insert after “forthwith” —

, subject to the debate being limited to 15 minutes for government members and 15 minutes for non-government members

Amendment put and passed.

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion, as Amended

The SPEAKER: Members, as this is a motion without notice to suspend standing orders, it will need the support of an absolute majority to succeed. If I hear a dissentient voice, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [3.11 pm]: I move the motion.

A few weeks ago, we saw the unfortunate incident of the horrific bashing of Mr Emiliano Lombardi. We saw the terrible pictures of the damage caused to Mr Lombardi and we know the ultimate outcome of that incident was the unfortunate death of Mr Lombardi, a man who was doing no harm to anyone and who should have been allowed to enjoy his retirement years in peace. Instead, he was viciously bashed. He eventually succumbed to the injuries from that bashing, denying him the opportunity to live many more years and denying his family and friends the opportunity to enjoy the company of someone who was obviously a well-loved and well-regarded person in our community. It is just not good enough that this is happening. It is not just Mr Lombardi, and I will talk about that in a moment.

We are seeing an increasing level of violence across our community. Yes, part of it is family violence, but all the statistics show that violent crimes of all types have increased significantly over the last few years and offences against the person in Western Australia are at a record level. Not the only solution, but one of the important pieces of the puzzle in keeping our community safe is an increase in police numbers. We have heard so many people crying out for more police. Our hardworking, overworked, underpaid and under-appreciated police officers are doing the best they can. We all thank our police officers for the work they are doing. But if we ask any police officer on the beat what we can do to help them, they say, “Give us some extra numbers. We need more police and we need them now.” The police officers are saying that. The police union is saying that. The chief commissioner of the City of Perth has said that. The mayoral candidates for the City of Perth are saying that. Today, even the Shire of Exmouth has asked for more police to deal with the problems of violence in that community.

The Premier came into this place today and claimed that he has put 300 extra police on our streets. That is what he has claimed, and he wants us to take him at face value. What are the facts around all that? What is the truth around all that? The only reliable figures we have are the figures in the police annual report. Between 2015 and 2017 under the previous government, there was an overall increase of 398 police officers, from 6 395 in 2015—these are financial year figures—to 6 793 in 2017.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Playing catch-up.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: It was playing catch-up, police minister! I will pick you up on that, because what sort of catch-up have you been doing subsequently since you came to power?

At the end of the 2017 financial year, there were 6 793 officers on the beat. At the end of the 2019 financial year—the most immediate available figures—there were 6 768. That is not an increase of 300 at all; it is a decrease of 25.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 8 September 2020]

p5475e-5480a

Mr Peter Katsambanis; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Mia Davies; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr John Quigley

Unless this government has managed to put on an extra 325 police over and above attrition in the last 12 months, what the Premier said today does not stack up. The Premier and the Minister for Police may have committed to more police, but they have not delivered more police, and the results are there for everyone to see. We have found out from the latest figures that the minister has provided us through questions on notice in this place that 11 of the 15 police districts in Western Australia do not have enough police simply to meet their authorised strength. That is not more police officers; that is fewer police officers in every region, including, unfortunately, the region that Mr Lombardi was living in—the Cannington police district. On the minister's own figures, 11 of the 15 police districts are undermanned.

We can look at the rise in assaults against our seniors. These are annual figures from January to December. Again, we have managed to get these figures from the government through questions on notice. In 2016, there were 611 assaults against seniors; in 2017, 638; in 2018, 661; and in 2019, 730. That is a massive increase on this government's watch.

We saw in the newspaper in the aftermath of the horrific thing that happened to Mr Lombardi articles about other elderly people who have suffered at the hands of these thugs in our community. In an article headed "Elderly easy prey of thugs" written by Josh Zimmerman and Charlotte Elton, there were a number of stories, including one about Perth Uber driver John Rowe, who tried to take his own life as a result of the post-traumatic stress disorder he suffered after a vicious bashing, and grandfather Sam Baldacchino, 72, who was left with 20 fractures around his eye socket and deep cuts to his right cheek when he was set on by drunk thugs while setting up his fruit and vegetable stall in Mandurah last year. The article states —

Mr Baldacchino said yesterday he was fortunate to escape with his life.

"When I see something like (what happened to Mr Lombardi)—straight away I think of myself ... I was very lucky," ...

"The law should change; the law should protect old people. It should be heavy, heavy punishment."

That is what this victim said. Another victim, Cyril Watson, woke up to find two men in his Wembley home brandishing a knife and a screwdriver. When the 70-year-old told them that he had no money, they punched him in his face. Mr Lombardi's bashing has brought those terrible memories flooding back, with Mr Watson saying that news of his death nearly destroyed him. These people are calling for tougher punishment. They are also calling for police to protect them, and the police are asking for more officers on the ground so that they can protect the community.

We saw in today's *The West Australian* an exclusive article by Josh Zimmerman headed "Surviving a foreign war only to cop a stabbing in Perth". It states —

Maria Alimanovic survived the Bosnian War only to be stabbed in the back of the neck and head with a broken beer bottle in the garden of her East Perth apartment.

The 79-year-old was watering plants in the communal area in January—a daily activity for the grandmother who arrived in WA in 1998—when a homeless woman began verbally abusing her.

This victim was hit across the head. She was in agony. The person who hit her was sentenced to only one year and nine months in jail after being charged with unlawful wounding in circumstances of aggravation, despite the maximum penalty being seven years. It is just not good enough. This government should not come into this place and try to spin itself out of a crisis of its own making, because these are real people with real stories who are suffering out there in our community. This government should be protecting them.

I want to close with a very important quote that I found just recently when I was looking at old stories. This quote states —

It is about time the government took responsibility because we can see very clearly its attitude towards policing and government generally. It is interested only in the media angle—what it can get out of it, how it can promote itself and how it can con the public into thinking it is doing a good job. It is all about smoke and mirrors.

Yes, it is. That quote is from today's police minister, the member for Midland, delivered in 2016. Unfortunately, the government she is part of, the Western Australian Labor government, is all about smoke and mirrors. It is about time it took its responsibilities seriously and looked after the most vulnerable elderly people in our community by providing more police on our streets to help protect our public.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [3.19 pm]: I, too, rise to speak to this motion. I have enlarged photographs from *The West Australian* of horrific scenes of seniors who have been bashed. It is a mosaic of our grandmothers and grandfathers with black eyes and broken arms. One woman whose case I was

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looking into, Mrs Thorning, was out for an early morning photo shoot and a thug drove past in his car and subjected her to a frenzied assault that lasted over three minutes when he bashed her senseless with a baseball bat. She was saved only because a couple of passers-by stopped and managed to intervene. The person who assaulted her got two years and four months in prison—two years and four months for changing that woman's life forever. On New Year's Eve, Karen Bland, a 60-year-old, and her two daughters were methodically knocked unconscious by thugs before they assaulted a police officer. In that instance, one alleged attacker, who basically gatecrashed a New Year's Eve party and beat these women until they were unconscious has not yet gone to court; he is still awaiting trial.

We contrast some of these sentences with that of the woman who breached the WA coronavirus border by hiding in a truck. She was handed a six-month jail sentence. She got a six-month jail sentence for avoiding the coronavirus quarantine period. Contrast that with someone who bashes a person and leaves them with post-traumatic stress disorder, a metal plate inserted in their cheek for life and too frightened to walk out into their front yard. We hear stories from seniors who have contacted our offices and say, "We can't afford to pay to install the shutters we need on our windows; we can't afford to pay for CCTV; we can't afford to pay for alarm systems. Without those things we don't feel safe anymore. We don't feel safe because we have seen photographs in *The West Australian* of older people." They are the most vulnerable people in the community, bashed, beaten and bloodied and some of them are subsequently losing their life through senseless violence that has happened under the watch of this government. The government cannot shy away from the figures it has published for the Parliament. The rate of assaults against seniors rose from 611 in 2018 by 20 per cent to 730 in 2019. That reflects two seniors being bashed every day—every single day. We should hang our heads in shame at those figures. This government has no answers for them.

We know what the problem is; there are not enough police. We have no quarrel with police officers being involved in the COVID-19 response. That is appropriate, and they are doing a terrific job. I am one who will stand in this chamber every day and talk about how wonderful our police officers are, because they are; they do a great job. However, they contact us and say that they are too frightened to intervene in a brawl or a melee because they know that only two of them will be there and they cannot get backup because officers have been sucked off the front line into the COVID-19 response and this government did not get on with the job of recruiting officers to replace them. The police academy should be full of officers in training to replace the officers who have been sucked off the front line to deal with COVID-19. COVID-19 will not go away until we have a vaccine. What is the government's solution in the interim? The police union has said that the Perth Police Centre has seen its authorised strength drop from 214 in 2014 to 175 this year. There are not enough police. The government needs to resolve it now and recruit officers into the academy now and get those officers onto the front line to protect our community.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.24 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Nationals WA to support this motion, and of course we do. We open our newspapers and listen to the radio and hear the terrible stories of violence and harm occurring across our communities. We see it in regional Western Australia. Our police are undermanned and understaffed in covering large jurisdictions. This is exacerbated in regional Western Australia by remoteness, isolation and lack of access to other support services. Last October, the Nationals WA raised serious concerns about the shortage of officers in regional WA. In October 2019 we were 95 FTE short of the authorised numbers of police required in regional Western Australia. At the most recent count in about April, we were 104.77 FTE short, and that number is going up.

We are faced with some headlines similar to those the two previous speakers read out from *The West Australian* such as "Young Pilbara father airlifted to hospital after being 'attacked by boy outside his house'." The headline "Detectives investigate serious burglary and assaults in Derby" is followed by —

A Derby man is in a serious but stable condition ... after he was the victim of a serious burglary and assault.

That was a man aged in his seventies who was attacked in his own home. A headline in the *South Western Times* states "Manhunt after teenage girl sexually assaulted while walking in Rangeway, Geraldton". Also the *South Western Times* contains a headline "Greenfields father accused of carjacking, threatening to kill elderly man in Mandurah". It goes on and on and on. We need a commitment from this government to increase police numbers in regional Western Australia and across the state.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police) [3.26 pm]: Further to the hypocrisy we have heard here, I appreciate the quote the member for Hillarys gave in the final part of his speech because that did accurately reflect the former government's position.

I might just start with countering the figures put forward by the Nationals because if there is any area in which there are more police, it is in regional Western Australia. That member has selectively quoted authorised strength versus actual numbers and so forth and says the figures are down. However, she does not go on to say that we have actually increased the authorised strength in those districts. The reality is that at 30 June 2016 there were 1 332 officers in

regional Western Australia. There are now 1 443 officers in actual numbers. The former government had an authorised strength of 1 413 and we have an authorised strength of 1 548, so we have dramatically increased the authorised strength for regional Western Australia and we are substantially up—well over 100 officers—on the number of officers the former government provided in regional WA. It just goes to show that an increase in police numbers is not the key factor here.

I ask people also to look at results. When I made those comments in 2016, it was in the context of double-digit increases in crime each month. We were seeing the rate of various crimes going up by 20 per cent each month when we compared them with the same time the previous year. They were the facts. The opposition introduced the failed policing model, which was an absolute debacle. Only half the number of officers were actually available to respond to crime. The others were put into so-called local policing teams that were not rostered 24/7. It was a complete debacle. Do not take my word for it. How about taking the words of the Liberal candidate for Forrestfield because he is saying that. He did not say it only when he was president of the WA Police Union; he is saying it now. He went to a Liberal Party crime forum in Kalamunda on 1 July this year and said that recently we had seen over the last few years a proposal for a particular model of policing. When the current government came in that changed to make where police were located more localised. We found previously under the old model that police officers were travelling extraordinary distances to attend an incident.

Now he is a Liberal Party candidate, he is being a bit restrained—not as critical as he was when he was union president. George Tilbury told the Kalamunda community that at the forum.

Talking about numbers of districts and being understaffed and so forth, remember what the former government did to numbers of districts? We went down to just four metropolitan districts. That is what George Tilbury was talking about. Midland, east metro and central were all one district. A person could be up in Bullsbrook and beyond, in the hills at Kalamunda and beyond, or in Wembley and they would be in the same district. How disingenuous is the member for Scarborough, the Leader of the Opposition, when she talks about district numbers in Perth now compared with district numbers in Perth then? Perth district used to combine everything in the east metro and central areas. Yes, there was a bigger number than what Perth district has now. It is a nonsense. To look at just districts and not look at all the specialised units is not a fair comparison. The model has changed. We got rid of the former government's discredited model that saw crime go up month after month and we have implemented a much more localised model that is working much better. Crime is down across the board. Since the opposition was in office, crime is down by 10 per cent. That is not insignificant. Even when we look at the figures quoted today for numbers of assaults on the elderly, if we look back at when the major increase occurred, it was over a select few years. Those few years happen to coincide with the years that the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Police. In 2012, there were 267 assaults against the elderly. By 2016, there were 611 assaults against the elderly; that is more than double. It is incredulous that the member for Scarborough could come in here and say, "Two assaults a week is terrible!" When she was minister, she did nothing. The numbers of assaults more than doubled in the Leader of the Opposition's few years as police minister and she did nothing.

Even today, the Leader of the Opposition came here with a simplistic solution. She still does not get it. She said today that we know what the problem is: we do not have enough police. The member for Hillarys suggested that while the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Police, the number of police went up, so where is the direct correlation between the number of police going up and the more than doubling of the number of assaults against the elderly? If there is a correlation, it is the inverse of what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting. She came in here today to say the problem is that there are not enough police and that the panacea for all crime is more police—that will fix it. The fact is that we have engaged over 300 more police. The member for Scarborough said the police academy should be full; the academy is full. At our last graduation, four or five schools all graduated at one time. People were fast-tracked through. An additional 150 police had already been engaged as part of our election commitments. Of the extra 150 who were promised at the start of the COVID pandemic, 120 police are already at the academy and 30 will be in the academy before the end of the month. That is the full 150 police.

The Leader of the Opposition continues to say that the answer is more police. It is a simple argument but it is not the right argument. The right argument looks at the causes of crime and what drives it. That is what she did not do when she was in office. She did not look at the causes or acknowledge the huge and escalating meth problem that was occurring under her watch. That is where there is a direct correlation. If we look at the test results for meth in the water during the former government's time in office, we can see that meth use increased astronomically. The number of assaults doubled at the same time. That is a correlation we needed to do something about. That is why we took a methamphetamine action plan to the last election and we have delivered on it. There are 100 additional police officers and 20 additional specialist staff to deal with and tackle the scourge of methamphetamine in our community. We know there is a direct correlation between meth use and crime. Every police officer will tell us that. They will tell us that the reason people assault the police and others in the community is that so many of them are high on drugs. It is one of the underlying issues we have to deal with. Another issue we have to deal with is mental health

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and wellbeing. They are the kinds of underlying factors we have to deal with. The Leader of the Opposition would have a point if there were not a strong police presence in Northbridge. She might have a point if crimes were going unsolved, but that is not the case. The rate of crimes being solved has gone up significantly since we have been in office. Police are catching more offenders. The indication is that when these assaults occur, be it in Northbridge or elsewhere, police are on the scene very quickly, if not immediately. Regarding the recent one-punch death in Northbridge, CCTV records show that two police had walked by that location less than a minute before the assault took place. We have to look more broadly.

The fact is that the former government absolutely failed on this. It had no solutions then and it has no solutions or policy now. Its only policy is to say, “If we had more police, suddenly people would not be assaulted.” Each assault is incredibly sad, but we acknowledge the problem; we acknowledge that there are certain drivers of crime and that people need to be appropriately punished. We have done that before. It is why, during the Gallop government, the maximum penalty was increased from 10 to 14 years’ imprisonment for assault, with the exacerbating factor of someone being elderly. Given the Leader of the Opposition’s record on crime, her suggestions are grossly hypocritical.

There has been a significant decrease in the number of crimes. Police officers have been allocated to COVID-related duties. Because of COVID, police duties have also changed. During the period when people were at home, the number of home burglaries reduced by between 40 and 50 per cent. Our Commissioner of Police and police force have responded very strongly. They have protected our community during COVID. Crime, right across the board, is significantly lower now than what it was a few years ago. In this state, we do not ever want a return to the Leader of the Opposition’s failed policing model. Police response times blew out and crime went up month after month by double digits.

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General) [3.38 pm]: I would like to thank the Minister for Police for so comprehensively dealing with the issue that is before the chamber at the moment. I will take a brief moment to draw attention to the publicity in *The West Australian*, largely under the by-lines of Mr Josh Zimmerman and Charlotte Elton, and also Emily Moulton. A previous Labor government years ago raised the maximum penalty by nearly 50 per cent for assaults on the elderly. The important role that the media plays in reporting on these things, as in the case of Mr Lombardi, is to emphasise to the judiciary the concerns of the community. I am sure that the judiciary hears the facts, the plea and any mitigating factors, but I think the judiciary also needs to have expressed to it from time to time, in the clearest terms, the general concern of the community. The assailant in Mr Lombardi’s case is before the court at the moment. The case of Buck, which was mentioned by the member for Hillarys, is before the court at the moment, as is the case involving the victim Baldacchino. Many of these cases are still to be dealt with by the court. It is important that the community’s courts, which are part of an independent and separate branch of government, hear from the community through the media and other channels the deep concern that we as a community have about these crimes. It is important that condign punishment is inflicted upon these offenders.

I refer to an article from *The West Australian* of Thursday, 3 September 2020, after the sentencing of Ibraheem Saleh. Mr Saleh was given a penalty of 15 months’ imprisonment, which was suspended for 18 months. I have the photo in *The West* here. When he came out of court he flipped the finger at the community. I am sure that he did not do that in front of Her Honour when the sentence was announced. This case is within the appeal period and the suitability or adequacy of the sentence imposed is currently being assessed by the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is by the exposure of this type of behaviour as criminals come out of court that judges and the DPP really get a taste of what these criminals think about the system. If they think they have got away with it, they just flip the bird—if I can use colloquial language—at the system and, more importantly, flip the bird at our community. This is what causes community concern. I thank the media for drawing it to the attention of the judiciary.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms J.M. Freeman) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (16)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr P.A. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr S.K. L’Estrange
Mr R.S. Love

Mr W.R. Marmion
Mr J.E. McGrath
Ms L. Mettam
Dr M.D. Nahan

Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr K.M. O’Donnell
Mr P.J. Rundle
Mr A. Krsticevic (*Teller*)

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Noes (37)

Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J. Farrer
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Ms E.L. Hamilton
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston

Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia

Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms C.M. Rowe
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Ms J.J. Shaw
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski

Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Pairs

Mrs A.K. Hayden
Mr D.T. Redman

Ms L.L. Baker
Mr T.J. Healy

Question thus negatived.