

PRISONS — REFORM

472. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I have a question for the Minister for Corrective Services, unlike the member for Cottesloe.

I refer to this government's reforms to corrective services to ensure Western Australia's custodial estate is safe, secure and efficient. Can the minister update the house on the work underway to ensure that our adult prison estate is safe for all staff and prisoners while ensuring that funding is invested responsibly and appropriately?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I thank the member for the question. He is brave enough to ask me a question, which is in contrast to other members of the chamber.

The corrective services portfolio is not an easy one. I have deep respect for the people who work in the sector. The question was about the adult prison estate. When I came to the role, a \$360 million budget cut had been implemented by the former government but had never been actioned; it had been rolled forward. One of the tasks I had was to deal with that \$360 million budget black hole. I have found \$120 million of savings and I have sought approval for, and have been given, \$240 million to fill in two-thirds of the hole. I thank the Treasurer for investing \$240 million in the prison estate to fix our recurrent funding activities.

One thing that we need to do is to reform. We have had the prison service evaluation, the Public Sector Commissioner has done a review, and when the Auditor General told me that she was going to look at overtime management, I was pleased to have that. I thank the Auditor General for her complimentary opening statement in the audit report, in which she set out her view that the work I was doing was very important and on the right track. I thank her for that.

One thing we are doing is dealing with workers' compensation. There were more than 120 cases that were more than eight years old. Any former union official would know how disgraceful that is. Over 100 of those have now been settled. We have a major emphasis on health and safety for the workforce, but I know that this is a challenging time because the amount of overtime that is available for the workforce has now reduced. That is a challenge for the workforce and for the union. That is why I am not surprised that Andy Smith, the secretary of the union, makes commentary regularly in the media, because this is a difficult time for him. What I was a bit surprised to find out was that he is not the secretary of the union! I draw members' attention—I will table the paper in a moment—to the decision of the Registered Organisations Commission dated 1 June. It states in part —

In response to the queries from Commission staff, the Branch has confirmed that no further scheduled election for Federal Offices has been conducted since election **E2016/196** was declared. That is, some offices have not been the subject of election for six years.

It goes on to state —

If that approach (to have persons remain in office without further election) was accepted, it would be contrary to the provisions in the ... Act about the length of a single term.

The decision also states —

The failure to hold the election for Federal Offices within the required period, indicates an apparent lack of understanding of relevant election related rules and of the obligation to lodge prescribed information in accordance with the ... Act ...

It also states —

I also draw attention to the matter of *Registered Organisations Commission v Australian Hotels Association*, in which the Federal Court imposed substantial penalties on a registered organisation which had contravened section 189(2) of the ... Act on multiple occasions. The Commission will engage further with the WAPOU Branch and the CPSU in relation to the recurrent late lodgement of prescribed information that in relation to the Branch, which leaves the organisation open to civil penalties.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: I seek your guidance on the relevance of the minister's answer, which is delving into union matters that have nothing to do with the question advanced by the member for Kalamunda.

The SPEAKER: At this point in time I am not going to accept that as a point of order. I am listening very carefully to the minister's answer. I do see that he is drawing an analogy. I am hoping that that analogy will come to a conclusion soon.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am sure it will, Madam Speaker. I am surprised at many things. Every time I meet a prison officer, I am amazed at the hard work they have to put in. They work in a terrible environment. You get

6 500 of the worst people in Western Australia and put them in 18 individual locations—I would not want to work there! It is a terrible job. The fact that they do it so well is a credit to them personally. I have talked to many of them and they have such deep engagement with the prisoners in the hope that they can help them get to a better place in their life. That is why so many prisoners do not return to prison—because of the strong influence. In fact, prisoner officers have said to me that they would walk down the street and run into former prisoners who congratulated them on the work they had done. They need to be properly rewarded. What we do not need is a union secretary who is not elected going to the media and criticising his comrades. Every criticism he has made so far of the prison service is of union members. Every complaint he has made is about one of his own union members. I am surprised that he does that when he is not elected to do the job. I would suggest that he urgently rectify this and allow the union to conduct its affairs in accordance with law and stop frustrating the opportunity for the members to have a say. I also draw the chamber's attention to the fact that there is no assistant secretary of the union.

Point of Order

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The point of order goes to relevance and how this relates to the safety of prison officers and the prison estate, which the question clearly related to.

The SPEAKER: I do think the minister is answering the question. His answer is bordering on a little long from my point of view at this time, and I am keen to give the opposition one last question.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Indeed. Of course, if there had not been a point order, I would have already finished my answer. I am surprised at the behaviour of the union secretary and I look forward to him complying with the laws of Australia. I table the document that I read from.

[See paper [1324](#).]

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition with the last question.