

POLICE — ADDITIONAL OFFICERS

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [3.34 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 condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to deliver enough frontline police officers, including ignoring requests for more police by the Commissioner of Police and the Perth City Council, resulting in out-of-control violence on our streets and decade-high crime rates in our city.

Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [3.35 pm]: I wish to add to the motion. I move —

To insert after “forthwith” the following —

, 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 for it to proceed. 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) [3.36 pm]: I move the motion.

It does not give me any satisfaction at all to move this motion. This is not a motion about the Liberal opposition talking the city or the state down. This is the recognition of the reality on our streets that people are facing every single day in the CBD and Northbridge, as well as the rest of Western Australia. Unfortunately, the situation is completely out of control because this government is far more interested in spin than it is in substance. It is far more interested in pretending it is doing something to alleviate a crisis than actually doing something. The facts and figures bear it out, as does the public commentary. It is not the state opposition that runs front-page articles in *The West Australian* or headline stories on the television news showing that violence is out of control. It is not the state opposition that encourages the chief commissioner of the Perth city council to call for more police to deal with out-of-control violence and it is not the Liberal opposition that encourages the chief commissioner of police to comment to *The West Australian*, as he did last week, with the headline “Fair Cop for CBD” on the front page on Friday, 8 November. The police commissioner was referred to and it states —

Top cop Chris Dawson wants the McGowan Government to help put more police on the front line. It comes as analysis of crime rates in the CBD (up 8 per cent last financial year) and Northbridge (up 11 per cent) reveals offences are at their highest level this decade.

Crime is out of control. The statistics bear it out. The shopkeepers, the traders and the customers, the people who live in the CBD and Northbridge, all the tourists who go in there—the local tourists, the interstate tourists and the overseas tourists—and the international students all know it is a problem. The chief commissioner of the Perth city council, a man charged with promoting the city, is calling for more police. The chief commissioner of police is calling for more police. What do we get from this government—from both the Minister for Police and today from the Premier in question time? They say they provided more police.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Police!

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: The minister will get her turn. She should be providing more police rather than coming in here and justifying it.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Police, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: During question time today we heard the Premier and by interjection now we hear the Minister for Police. Interestingly, as we know, the Minister for Police and the Premier are clearly not on the same page, which is why we have this crisis to begin with. Instead of providing more police officers, they come in here and seem to have hired another spin doctor. Despite the army of spin doctors they have, they have hired

one more. “Comical Ali” must be their latest spin doctor—“Baghdad Bob”. Do members remember him from Iraq? “Nothing to see here. The Americans are going to cop it.” That is what the Premier was doing today. He was mimicking “Comical Ali”, from back in the Iraq War days.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Just calm down, everyone! Members on both sides!

Mr D.A. Templeman: What did you have for lunch?

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, I do not know what you had for lunch either, but you had about 12 kids with you! I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: The Premier has been caught out. We asked the Premier to provide more police. What is his answer? “We have provided 150 more.” Let us go to the actual, real statistics, not the fake ones this government likes to trot out; not the glib, spin doctor statements that the government likes to trot out.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: The statistics do not lie. On 30 June 2017 —

Mr R.R. Whitby interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Baldivis, you settle down!

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: Based on the police annual report, on 30 June 2017 there were 6 793 police officers in this state. That was a significant increase on the year before—161 officers had been added in just one year, the last year of the Barnett Liberal government. One year later, in June 2018, the police annual report showed that there were 6 808 police officers—an increase of 15. We would have expected, given that this government said it had put on an extra 150 officers, that the number would have increased again in 2019, but the police annual report shows that on 30 June 2019 there were 6 768 police officers—a decrease of 40 officers from the year before, and a decrease from June 2017 as well. Instead of increasing the number of police officers, the number is going down.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Police, you are on two calls.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: To get those 150 extra officers for the regional enforcement task force and the meth border force, the government is taking police from one place and putting them somewhere else. We have had enough of that. The government cannot just shuffle the deckchairs and say, “There’s a problem in Mandurah; we’ll take some from Cockburn. There’s a problem in Fremantle; we’ll take some from Perth. There’s a problem in Cockburn; we’ll take some from Joondalup.” The government cannot just do that, and I have not even had time to touch on our regions. Not one regional police district has a full police complement at the moment, because this government cannot put police officers on the beat. The Commissioner of Police is calling out for it; the President of the WA Police Union was quoted in the same article as crying out for more cops and saying that officers were frustrated about being ordered to do more with less. That is exactly what they are doing. Our officers are doing a tough job, and they are doing it as well as they can. They need support and additional boots on the ground. The government needs to stop spinning, making it up and pretending, and start actually doing something. Enough is enough. The Labor Party has been in government long enough now; it needs to stop blaming other people and put additional boots on the ground to give the Western Australian public the extra police officers it deserves.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.42 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Nationals WA to support this motion, and a very good motion it is. A number of regional communities right across the length and breadth of Western Australia are very concerned about their safety. We think the state government is actually jeopardising community safety through its failure to provide enough regional police officers. Questioning by our police spokesperson in the Legislative Council, Hon Martin Aldridge, has revealed through the latest statistics that there are 95 unfilled positions in rural police districts. As the member for Hillarys quite rightly said earlier, there is not one district across regional Western Australia that has a full complement of police officers, and it is absolutely unacceptable to us that the Minister for Police has not ensured that the regions have their full quota of police officers.

Rural areas are not getting the police cover that they deserve. We have raised many issues in this place on rural and regional crime, illicit drug use and traffic enforcement. Today we raised issues in relation to Newman. In regional communities, police officers are sometimes the only people on the ground from a government perspective. In our smaller communities, the police officers who are prepared to turn up at any time of the day or night are under incredible pressure because they do not have the full complement to support them in doing their job. They are being left to do the jobs that other government agencies are unable to do because they do not operate around the clock.

The wheatbelt is 18.25 full-time officers down—these are statistics from around September—on the Western Australia Police Force’s authorised staffing requirements. The midwest and Gascoyne districts are 16.5 officers below the required quota. In the south west region, the figure is 19.17 under the mark; goldfields–Esperance is down 20.5 officers; and the great southern is 5.7 staff short. There is a very uneasy mood in a lot of these communities. Our regional police officers need additional support and we need to make sure that they are being provided with an appropriate level of staffing right across the regions.

In early September we saw a billion dollars’ worth of illicit drugs being seized by chance off the midwest coast, following the disbanding of the state’s only regionally based water police vessel. We now have a state that is reliant on emergency services and volunteers for surveillance and transport, and local fishermen when it comes to bringing in some of these big hauls. That is completely unacceptable to us and we need to make sure that the government understands what this means to the communities that these officers seek to serve. They want to be able to do their job appropriately. With undermanning and understaffing, they are stretched to the limit, and as a result, as the opposition has laid out, we will see crime increasing in various areas across the state. We need to make sure that these regional communities are being supported. The city-centric focus is extending to the police force, but we hear from our opposition colleagues that there are certainly some serious concerns in the metropolitan area as well. This is, indeed, an issue right across the state.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [3.46 pm]: I also rise to contribute to this very serious matter. I want to take members back to a grand statement by the Premier. It was reported in *The Australian* of 5 May 2017 —

... highly paid bureaucrats who fail to meet key performance indicators will be slashed by up to \$60,000 a year, under a plan ...

...

Similarly, the salaries of the heads of health and police could be tied to the rate of methamphetamine use in Western Australia ...

That is what the Premier said he was going to do. Then, just to ensure that the Commissioner of Police could not meet any of the key performance indicators he had been set, it was reported in *The West Australian* of 11 August 2018 —

Police Commissioner Chris Dawson concedes looming budget cuts imposed by the State Government will make it “difficult” to maintain the same level of policing across the State.

...

Instead, he continues to grapple with an order—issued when he took the helm in August last year—to slash \$250 million from his budget over five years.

What we are now seeing in the Perth CBD and in Northbridge is a direct result of the decisions of Mark McGowan, Minister for Police Michelle Roberts and Treasurer Ben Wyatt—decisions of the McGowan Labor government. They made a decision to slash the police budget —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: They made a decision to slash the police budget and change the policing model. They made a decision to sack City of Perth councillors and not let elected members in for an extended period, and what do we have now?

Mr M.J. Folkard interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Burns Beach, I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member for Burns Beach can bleat as much as he likes from back there —

Mr M.J. Folkard interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Burns Beach, I call you to order for the second time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I quote from an article that appeared in *The West Australian* of Thursday, 7 November 2019 —

Police Commissioner Chris Dawson wants the McGowan Government to help put more cops on the frontline, as analysis of the CBD and Northbridge crime rates reveals offences are at their highest level this decade.

...

Asked by The West Australian on Thursday if he wanted more cops, Mr Dawson replied: “I do want more officers.

This is what we are hearing from police. They are struggling and under-resourced. They need more officers. The Premier came in here and misled the Parliament by saying that there are more officers now than there were when the Labor Party took government. The figures from the police report do not lie. I refer to a page from the Western Australia Police Force “Annual Report 2019”, under the heading “Obligatory Disclosures” and the subheading “Profile of Police Officers by Gender (Headcount)”. The total number of officers by headcount for 2017 was 6 793, and for 2019, 6 768. That is a smaller number—smaller by 25 officers, so the government cannot dodge the figures when the police annual report is obliged to report on police FTE. Members, the headcount can be deceiving. This is the number of individuals employed in the Western Australia Police Force and it includes all the part-timers. We do not know the level of cuts that have been made to the police, but I note that footnote (a) under “Obligatory Disclosures” states —

The reduced headcount for police officers in 2019 is the result of increased attrition due to 150 officers accepting a severance.

That is the problem. The police lost 150 officers and did not recruit more officers to replace them and now there are fewer officers at a time when out-of-control crime in Northbridge and the CBD has reached the point at which it is having an economic impact. We are hearing from businesses and traders in the CBD and Northbridge that customers have fled from those areas. They are too scared to go to businesses in Northbridge and the CBD because they are frightened of crime and antisocial behaviour, which we saw on the CCTV footage released by the City of Perth. The footage showed outrageously violent acts against innocent people who are trying to go about their business and run their stores and innocent individuals trying to spend a few dollars in those businesses, something that every business in Western Australia needs right now. And what do we get from this government? Its head is in the sand: “We’ll give them telephones. We won’t give them more police officers so that they can actually respond to crime in a timely manner and help curtail the epidemic.” When the Premier was on this side of the house and the figures were much lower, he said that the Perth CBD and Northbridge were like downtown Detroit. Now we have record numbers, a 10-year high in crime in Northbridge, and where is he now?

The SPEAKER: Members, I remind you to turn your phones down, please.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police) [3.51 pm]: What an extraordinary fit of hysteria we saw from the member for Hillarys. I wonder what he had for lunch, or maybe he has not slept because he was wound up quite incredibly. He talked about terrorists from overseas and he did not remember that he is in Western Australia, not Victoria. He kept referring to the chief commissioner of police, which, of course, is what it is in Victoria. That is not what we have here. He got the title wrong for the Commissioner of Police, the highest police officer in this state, which is indicative of how sloppy he is.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, I want to hear this, please.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Is somebody getting get called to order, Mr Speaker?

The fact of the matter is that there is very little truth in what the member for Hillarys had to say. He screamed in here, “Crime is out of control”, in an attempt to instil fear in people’s hearts and scare the community, and suddenly he said, “Western Australia is in crisis”, because of some huge increase in crime. The only time in the history of WA that we have had double-digit increases in crime was under the member for Scarborough’s watch when we saw month on month, right across every district in the metropolitan area, crime going up by double digits. We have not seen anything like that; in fact, we have not got back to the high that the member for Scarborough achieved in 2016. Members opposite keep choosing —

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I want to hear this.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: — a suburb here and a suburb there and looking at a three-month period and portraying a spike in crime.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: They are portraying a spike in crime in an individual suburb for a three-month period as a catastrophic event. Spikes in crime occur from suburb to suburb from time to time, but members should look at the statistics right across the board, which I will get to in a moment.

I will clarify some of the mistruths that we have heard in the debate this afternoon. Firstly, the member for Scarborough kept talking up some kind of decrease in the police budget. That is not the case. The fact of the matter is that the McGowan government has increased funding to the Western Australia Police Force by \$245 million over 2017–18 to 2020–21 compared with the Barnett–Harvey government’s forward estimates over the same period. The fact of the matter is that the Barnett–Harvey government’s 2018–19 forward estimates saw a cut that took the budget back to \$1 385 million.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, your own minister is on her feet.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The McGowan budget is \$1 470 million, which is an increase of \$85 million. If we look at the previous government’s forward estimates for 2019–20 and compare it with ours, we will see that ours is up \$109 million. This is a nonsense.

In addition, the opposition’s next line was that there has been a cut to the number of police officers in this state. That, too, is incorrect. The one thing that opposition members got right was that the WA Police Union has said that it would like an increase in numbers. During the last election, the police union said that it would like a thousand more police. What did the member for Scarborough say? She said, “No, you can’t have 1 000—have zero, have none.” In the face of a 20 per cent increase in crime, she said there would be no extra police at all. In the face of doing nothing much about deaths on country roads, she said there would be no additional officers. We committed to 100 additional officers for the meth border force, 25 additional officers for the regional enforcement unit and 13 officers for the extended-hours police stations so that areas such as Ellenbrook could enjoy the same level of policing as other areas. Since then, we have increased that number by another 10 officers, taking the total to an additional allocation of 148 officers. They are here now on the ground.

The figures in the annual report are accurate as at 30 June. They are not accurate as of today. The fact of the matter is, as the Premier outlined in question time, on 28 February 2017, there were 6 732 officers and on 30 June 2019, there were 6 768, but as of 7 November, there were 6 885 officers. That is an increase of 153 officers. I announced in here a month or so ago that more squads than ever before are training at the academy at the one time. As members will know, we offered a redundancy scheme across the public sector, which was also offered to police officers. Where it varied from the former government’s redundancy scheme, though, was that that money was not taken from the police budget. The police did not have to fund the redundancy scheme to pay out about 150 officers as it did when the Barnett–Harvey government ran a similar redundancy scheme. It takes time to replace those officers. We have had schools of recruits entering the academy, some covering regular attrition, some for our added complement and some to cover the redundancies that occurred early on during our term in government. Although that number was down on 30 June, it is now significantly up, and it is up by 153 officers. They are the facts—there are more officers. Let us remember, the former government promised none—zero extra police officers—whereas here and now there is an additional 153 officers.

I empathise with the situation in Newman. However, that situation has been ongoing for some months. The Commissioner of Police, and others, are aware of it. I think the National Party is also well aware of it. The issues in Newman are complex and cannot be resolved by the WA Police Force alone. The police force is part of an interagency group. I note the member asked for a committee to be established. The member should know that an interagency group that includes Police, Housing and other agencies is looking at those complex issues and is taking action. The Commissioner of Police, along with the assistant commissioner and the commander for regional Western Australia, were in Newman recently. They spoke to people on the ground, and they are working with other agencies to address those complex issues. I expect the member is well aware that there is a significant number of vacant houses in Newman. That is just one aspect of the problems in Newman. We are dealing with some of the social issues that need to be dealt with through our Methamphetamine Action Plan, and by taking action on alcohol restrictions in the Pilbara, which are the things that drive crime.

When the Leader of the Opposition and member for Scarborough was Minister for Police, she did not provide stab-proof vests and body cameras for police officers; she starved frontline police officers of resources; she brought in a model that split the Western Australia Police Force in two, with response teams, and so-called local police teams; and she took the police force to the depths of despair. Therefore, it is a bit sad that the Leader of the Opposition is now making light of the fact that this government is rolling out mobile phones to our police officers. I am proud that we are doing that. This is about equipping our police officers with the tools they need to do the job. Someone’s mum or dad may have Alzheimer’s and have wandered off. Imagine the utility of being able to send a photograph of that person straight to the phone of every frontline officer. A person’s child may have wandered off, and the police are asked to look for them. Imagine the utility of police officers having a photograph of that child on their phone and being able to identify them in a shopping centre or park. It is amazing. An armed robbery may have taken place. Someone may have taken a picture of the vehicle or of the armed robber who is on

the run. Imagine the utility of being able to send that photograph straight to the frontline officers so that they can respond accordingly. What an amazing tool for police officers to have at their fingertips. That tool was denied to them by the Leader of the Opposition and member for Scarborough. It beggars belief that she is now talking about that important tool with contempt.

I have given some examples of information being sent to officers. Imagine if a police officer like Shane Gray in the Pilbara had been able to use his phone to check the numberplate of the vehicle to find out whether the driver had a significant criminal history, had a gun licence, or was a known outlaw motorcycle gang member. This will provide safety for police officers. It is a shame that the Leader of the Opposition learnt nothing in her time as Minister for Police. It is a shame that she still does not support our police officers. She does not understand the job that they do, and what they need at the frontline. She does not believe police officers deserve stab-proof vests. She does not think body cameras would be useful for them. She laughs about our government providing police officers with mobile phones, as though that is just some kind of toy. It is not. In this day and age, it is essential to equip our police officers with the information that they need to protect themselves and the community.

This government has increased the police budget significantly. We have increased police numbers by 153 officers. That is the accurate figure as of a few days ago. The crime statistics year-on-year have varied across the board by about one per cent. In many suburbs, if I went through the list, there have been decreases in crime of up to 30 per cent. However, of course we do not hear those figures trotted out in this place. We do not hear that in Bicton, crime is down by 36 per cent; in Kwinana, by 30 per cent; in Dawesville, by 28 per cent; in Balcatta, by 17 per cent; and in Southern River, by 16 per cent.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am not taking interjections, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Members, no interjections, please. The minister has only one minute to go.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: In Kalgoorlie, crime is down by 16 per cent; in Burns Beach and Mirrabooka, by 10 per cent; in Mount Lawley, Belmont and Baldivis, by nine per cent; in Morley, by six cent; and in Bunbury, by six per cent. The list goes on. Anyone can look at a short period of time, in suburb by suburb, and there will be fluctuations. What the opposition has done today is not just untrue, but is scandalous fearmongering.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Ms L. Mettam	Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr A. Krsticevic	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mrs A.K. Hayden (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Dr D.J. Honey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Noes (35)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Ms J.J. Shaw
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr S.J. Price	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr M. McGowan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms C.M. Rowe	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr M. Hughes	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms A. Sanderson	

Pair

Mr J.E. McGrath

Mr J.N. Carey

Question thus negatived.