

Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Rob Johnson; Deputy Speaker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mike Board; Mr Arthur Marshall; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Bernie Masters

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## CANNABIS CONTROL BILL 2003

### *Second Reading*

Resumed from 20 March.

**MR C.J. BARNETT** (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [10.05 am]: The Liberal Party vehemently opposes this legislation. As I remarked earlier in the week, this Bill should probably be called the “Cannabis Out of Control Bill 2003”. There are overwhelming reasons to not support this legislation. If there will be one difference between the Premier and me leading up to the next election, it will be the Premier’s soft stance on drugs and my position, and that of the Liberal Party, of supporting parents and families to fight drugs and to stop young children, young teenagers and schoolchildren from being involved with cannabis and, potentially, with other more damaging drugs. Cannabis is extraordinarily damaging. The Liberal Party opposes this legislation for many reasons, and will oppose it both within this Parliament and in the community. I assure the House that Liberal Party members will voice their opposition to the legislation in each of their electorates over the coming weeks.

I advise members that there will be no pairs in this Parliament for the duration of debate on this Bill because of the importance of this legislation. That means that every member of Parliament will have every opportunity to tell their constituents what they believe should happen with the decriminalisation of cannabis. I will publicly demand that all members of the House, whether it be the member for Girraween or the member for Joondalup, stand in this Chamber over the course of this debate and tell their constituents, parents, families, church groups, social workers and community police officers where they stand on this issue. We will ask all members that question, and we will ask their local media to ask them as well. They will all be on the record. They will not be able to hide by being paired. There will be no pairs in this Parliament during this debate.

There are a host of reasons for opposing this legislation, including health reasons, particularly for young people. No reason is as important as the impact of cannabis use on mental health. Members will discuss that issue in detail and provide examples of real people - real parents and real young people - who are in our mental health system, who have suicided, who have become desperate or who have lost their way in life, simply because of cannabis and its abuse.

Other issues relate to the supply of and access to drugs. There will be a vast increase in the availability of cannabis in our community if this legislation is passed. The Government’s policy of tolerating the growing of up to two plants will cause a proliferation in production of cannabis in the suburbs and towns of this State. Western Australia will quickly gain an unenviable reputation of being soft on drugs.

The potency of the cannabis of today is vastly different from the cannabis that I imagine some members of this House may well have used in the 60s or 70s during their university or other youthful days. It is probably 15 times more potent. Therefore, the damaging effects are that much greater.

There are criminal elements that we need to deal with. The amount of cannabis being talked about is a dealable quantity. I demonstrated that earlier this week and I will demonstrate it again and again. Thirty grams purchased for \$300 will have a much higher street value when sold to schoolchildren. That is what the Labor Party is doing; it is creating a situation in which cannabis will be sold in increasing quantities to schoolchildren for \$25 a throw or less. In many cases it will be broken down to \$5 packets for a couple of cones. That is what the Government is doing; it is what individual government members will be bound to explain to their constituents. Constituents will be asking them; I guarantee that. Local media and church groups will ask members for their individual position. Even Madam Deputy Speaker will be asked; her community will ask her why she is adding to the risks for young people and ignoring overwhelming evidence on the health effects of cannabis. Government members will be asked why they are pandering to organised crime and creating a situation leading to more home burglaries, home invasions and violence in our community.

There are also safety issues for cannabis users and other people. Road safety issues must be highlighted. There is increasing evidence about fatalities from road accidents associated with cannabis. Not enough research has been done, yet the Labor Party does not care.

There are work safety issues. It is no coincidence that mining companies, when they have people who operate heavy equipment in potentially dangerous conditions, have a zero tolerance policy on cannabis. Why do members think that is? They realise the risk to workers and colleagues.

Educational issues are also important. An enormous effort has been made in recent years to try to educate young people in schools about the dangers of cannabis. It was having an effect. I am not saying that young people did not experiment or use cannabis - I am a realist - but they were being educated in our schools about the long-term damage caused by cannabis to health, social factors, career, study and personal development. It has worked well. The program was instituted by the previous Government and continued thus far. It has been supported by

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educationalists, the community, police and schools, both government and non-government. What is the message now? Schools are saying stay away from cannabis but the Government and Premier of the State are saying a little bit is okay. It is a mixed message; we cannot give mixed messages to young people at impressionable ages. That is what the Government is doing.

There are many policing issues. There is supposed to be discretion; I do not know whether there is or not. We will go through the issues. There are many legal issues in this Bill. It is sloppy legislation for a start. That will be exposed during the debate.

I will go back to what this issue is all about. Various reasons have been given by the Labor Party why it is proceeding with this. I want to place on the public record that the Premier is not here. I will ask every speaker in this debate to record whether the Premier has the courage of his convictions to be present during this debate. This is the most important social issue to come before this Parliament for a long time. When every member speaks we will note whether the Premier of Western Australia is even bothering to participate in the debate or whether he is running from scrutiny, as he does with every other issue. He ain't even here!

Let us hear what he and others have to say about this issue. Various reasons have been offered why this legislation is before the House. The Labor Party has stated four great lies. The first great lie of the Labor Party is that the legislation, the so-called Cannabis Control Bill, is here as a result of the Community Drug Summit. *Hansard* of 5 December 2001 records that when the Premier of this State was asked about cannabis yields and the potential for dealing, he stated -

I repeat: the Community Drug Summit came up with some recommendations and the Government has endorsed those recommendations.

On 27 November 2001 he stated -

We have taken on board the findings of the summit . . .

That is the Premier. His explanation is that all the Government is doing is enacting the recommendations of the Drug Summit. That is lie number one. This has nothing to do with the Drug Summit; it was ALP policy from day one. This did not come from the Drug Summit; it came from Labor Party policy. I will go through that again in more detail later.

Let us look at lie number two. The second reason given was the protection of our children. I will quote the member for Rockingham, who I hope will come clean with his constituents, because there is a big drug problem in his electorate. In April 2002 he said -

The consequence of that view-

That is, the Liberal view -

is that young people between 16 and 19 years of age would have a criminal record and the consequences of that record would extend to the rest of their lives.

In a similar vein, the Premier said -

We do not want to see many thousands of young Western Australians caught up in the criminal system and affected by that for the rest of their lives.

The legislation does not apply to people under 18 years of age. It does not apply to the groups I think the member for Rockingham was referring to; that is, 13, 14 and 15-year-olds in our schools. The second justification is to help young people, but this legislation does not apply to them. In fact, it will harm them, because their older brothers and sisters and neighbours will be growing cannabis in their backyards. The kids will be stealing it and using it. The Government will be harming young people, not helping them. The second justification for the legislation is the second great lie by the Labor Party about this legislation.

Regarding the third great lie, on 22 November 2001 the Premier said -

We have simply continued and developed the system of cannabis cautioning established by the Court Government.

That is an absolute lie.

*Points of Order*

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Leader of the Opposition has continually accused the Premier and Government members of lying. We all know that is unparliamentary. I believe the Leader of the Opposition is doing it in order to provoke some response from the Government and to cause controversy. He knows he is being unparliamentary and I ask that he not refer again to members of this place having lied.

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Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the Opposition is not calling the Premier a liar. That would contravene standing orders. He is stating that the comments made by the Labor Party are great lies. He is not reflecting adversely on any particular member of this House by saying he has been lying. His comments encompass the Labor Party and its policy as being a great lie. I do not regard anything about that as being unparliamentary.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The standing orders are quite clear on this. Regarding a general statement on policy, there is no problem. However, if the member makes a comment that is a direct accusation of the Premier being a liar, he will need to withdraw it.

*Debate Resumed*

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To suggest that this is an extension of the coalition's program is totally false. I will return to that point later. Under the Liberal-National coalition, users were given one warning for possession. There were no let-offs for cultivation or unlimited repeated warnings. There was compulsory education rather than voluntary education. That program was quite different. There was no extension of the caution system. That is the third great lie for justification of this legislation.

The fourth great lie is that the legislation will save people from having criminal records. On 26 May 2002 the Minister for Health stated -

Research has shown that people with a conviction for a minor cannabis offence can have employment problems, difficulty in obtaining accommodation, travel problems and an increased risk of future contact with the criminal justice system.

This legislation does not apply to people under the age of 18 years. Secondly, the system operating in South Australia, which uses infringement notices and cautions, shows that the reality that half the young people doped out do not pay their fines. What happens? They automatically end up in the justice system with a conviction. In fact, 45 per cent of infringement notices in South Australia are not paid, which results in convictions. There is evidence that this system results in more convictions being recorded. They are the great lies of the Labor Party.

It should be noted on the public record that it says this Bill comes from the Drug Summit. It does not. It is Labor Party policy and always has been. That is what it is about. The Labor Party said that it would stop people getting criminal records. The evidence does not suggest that at all; in fact, the opposite is the case. The Labor Party said that it would help young people. It does not even apply to young people. It also said that it is no more than the coalition did. Those things are blatant lies. This Premier, this Minister for Health and members of the Labor Party have misled this Parliament and have set about to deliberately mislead the people of Western Australia. They are the four blatant lies that have been told in this Parliament and to the public, and they will be exposed over and over again in this debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I urge the Leader of the Opposition to be cautious in his comments and the way in which he is expressing them. That was very close to breaching parliamentary standards.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This is a very important issue; there is no more important issue. I do not wish to create problems for the Chair. However, I assure the Deputy Speaker that, on an issue like this, she can expect a full-on debate in this Parliament. There will be no holds barred in this. The member for Albany giggles. Will he be honest with his constituents? Will he tell the people in Albany what this legislation will mean for that community? I will tell the member what the public opinion is: it is very much against decriminalising cannabis.

I recognise that cannabis use is not uncommon. Indeed, various studies have been conducted. Probably the most reliable information indicates that, on a national basis, maybe a third of the population have tried cannabis at some stage. That is probably a reasonable figure; that would be my guess. It is estimated that about 13 per cent have used the drug at some stage in a relatively recent period. Therefore, maybe a third of the population have tried cannabis at some time. Perhaps 10 to 15 per cent still occasionally use it; some of them are heavy users of cannabis. It is not a problem that anyone ignores. That is why the previous Government introduced drug education programs targeted at cannabis particularly, and why it had a cautioning system to try to identify people - perhaps one-time users or occasional users - and provide an education program to caution them and hopefully stop them going down that path.

What does the public think about this proposal to decriminalise cannabis? Sixty per cent of Australians believe that marijuana should remain illegal. Only about 20 per cent of people believe that just a fine is adequate. A Westpoll was conducted in this State and *The West Australian* of 23 March 2002 stated -

The latest Westpoll shows 56 per cent of people oppose the plan to fine people caught with 25g of cannabis or two plants instead of charging them with a criminal offence.

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People do not like what the Government is doing. As they learn more about it, they are becoming more and more convinced that the Government should not send out the message about decriminalising cannabis: a little bit is okay, and it is okay to grow a couple of plants. The parents and the wider community in this State do not support that.

I asked people in my electorate what they thought about it. I am still getting phone calls to my office at Parliament House and to my electorate office. I have asked people to give me their opinion in writing, whatever it may be. I am sure that many members are getting similar responses. I will not identify anyone, but I will read out some examples of the responses from people in my electorate in the past few days. One gentleman rang and said that he has a 28-year-old son who has never worked. He smokes 40 joints a week and abuses alcohol and heroin, and has attempted suicide many times. His psychiatrist has made a direct connection between his present mental condition and abuse of cannabis since the age of 12 or 13.

Another one is from a lady in my electorate. The Minister for Health is not interested. No wonder the health system is in crisis when we have a health minister who is more interested in putting cannabis on the streets than in solving health problems. This woman in my electorate said that she has a 37-year-old daughter who is suicidal and is now being treated in the public health system as a result of cannabis abuse over many years. She has not worked for seven years and has been on a disability pension for two years. Probably a third of the people in our mental health system are in there for drug-related, especially cannabis-related, problems. The Labor Party ignores that. The damage to young lives, the heartache to families and the cost to the taxpayer of an already failing mental health system are enormous. Not one government member has had the conviction or the interest in mental health issues to even address that. I wonder whether they will as this debate continues. I doubt that they will.

Another lady from my electorate said that she lost her stepson three years ago at the age of 17 and a half, all because of a bit of marijuana. She lost her 17-year-old boy, I presume through suicide, all because of a bit of marijuana. There is mounting evidence of suicide, of road tragedy and of work accidents associated with cannabis. There is enormous evidence of the immense damage to physical and mental health through cannabis use. There are many examples of lost young lives, of families breaking up, of despair and of young people who can never succeed at school, TAFE or university and who can never get or hold a job because of the use of cannabis. It is a curse on our community; and the Labor Party is proceeding to decriminalise it.

I will go back to the truth of this. As I said, there were the four great lies about this. Let us go back to see what the Labor Party was really about on this issue. Forget any fancy words: this is about decriminalising cannabis. The community is now starting to understand that. It has always been a part of the agenda of many people in the Labor Party. It has always been the case. The Labor Party cannot deny it. Two ministers - the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure - are members of a parliamentary group for drug law reform. They are just two examples in Cabinet.

In 1999, at the state conference of the ALP, it was unanimously decided that the decriminalisation of the possession of up to 100 grams of cannabis and the cultivation of five plants would be part of the ALP platform. In 1999 the Labor Party resolved, as a political party, that it would go down the route of decriminalisation. Some members of the party saw the danger - not the danger to health, to crime and to public safety and road safety, but the political danger. The political danger is the only thing that affects the Labor Party on this issue. That is all it has ever cared about in this issue, and it is all it cares about today. The now Minister for Education and Training commented that the Caucus had decided that that policy had been misinterpreted, and that in fact it went too far. Even within the Labor Party's own ranks people started to have doubts, probably only because of the political implications.

What did the Labor Party do going into the election campaign? What was its election position? The ALP's "direction statement drugs and crime" states -

We propose a decriminalised regime which would apply to possession of 50 grams of cannabis or less and cultivation of no more than two plants per household.

Hang on. Does that not sound familiar? Going into the election campaign the Labor Party policy was to decriminalise up to 50 grams and allow the growing of two plants. What do we have now? It is exactly that. What was the Drug Summit all about, apart from trying to give some credibility to Labor Party policy?

*Point of Order*

Mr R.C. KUCERA: On a technicality, the legislation clearly states 30 grams.

Mr C.J. Barnett: There is no point of order, bozo.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: There is obviously no point of order. I suggest the minister is just trying to delay this debate and trying to excuse his dreadful legislation.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. However, I am sure the Leader of the Opposition has noted the point.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

Mr M. McGOWAN: I just heard the Leader of the Opposition refer to the Minister for Health as a bozo. I submit to the House that that is unparliamentary, and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Once again, there is no point of order. This is a very sensitive issue, and people on the other side of the House are very sensitive about it. A member on this side was referred to as a dope yesterday, and there was no point of order in that case. I suggest there is no point of order now.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Further to the withdrawal of remark, the standing orders are clear about the way in which members are to be addressed in this House. I think we will find that this debate will be quite robust. However, I ask members to address the standing orders and address each other in an appropriate way.

*Debate Resumed*

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Labor Party had a policy at the 1999 state conference to decriminalise and allow the cultivation of cannabis. It went into the election with the simple statement that it would do that and it would hold a Community Drug Summit. I remind members that the Premier has claimed the reason for having this legislation is that it simply enacts the results of the Drug Summit. However, what happened at the Drug Summit? It was true that the issue of decriminalisation of cannabis was raised at the 2001 Drug Summit. However, delegates were clearly directed to consider the merits of Labor's specific proposal rather than the issue of decriminalisation; the delegates did not get a say on that matter. In the Community Drug Summit brief that was given to candidates, it states under "Matters for Consideration" that -

The Government has a genuinely open mind on a number of matters but consistent with its policies on health, civil rights, law reform and crime it asked delegates to give consideration to, and make recommendations regarding;

- changes to the State's cannabis laws involving decriminalisation of;
- the cultivation of up to 2 plants;
- possession of up to 50 grams;

That just keeps coming up does it not? Now the Government has backed off from 50 grams to 30 grams, but it just keeps coming up. The great lie that members of the Labor Party have tried to perpetrate is that this legislation simply enacts a conclusion of the Drug Summit. It was Australian Labor Party policy at its state conference in 1999. The Labor Party went to the election with that statement. It had a Drug Summit to vindicate or justify its policy and when it got the delegates into this Chamber, it gave them the instruction that they could talk about whatever they wanted, but, at the end of the day, they had to provide advice on how the Government should decriminalise possession of cannabis and allow the cultivation of two plants. Members opposite should not pretend that this is the result of the Drug Summit. The Drug Summit was led by its nose from day one by this minister who effectively gave that instruction to the delegates. What an absolute sham and a disgrace, but it is totally consistent with his behaviour on virtually every issue in this House.

The working group after the summit was headed by Mr John Prior. A number of members of the working group were well known members of the law reform campaigners. They were advocates for the decriminalisation and cultivation of cannabis. This thing was stacked from day one. It was never going anywhere other than to the point where this legislation is now before the House. People in the community are not fools. This Government thinks it has been clever and smart. It is not that clever or that smart and the public is not that stupid. Members of the public can see that this Government has misled the community all along because it did not want to admit that it was Labor Party policy. Why was it Labor Party policy? It was Labor Party policy because the Labor Party is absolutely beholden to the drug lobby, which is effectively a factional group that can deliver votes and can campaign. This group worked within the Labor Party because it knew it would be wasting its time with the Liberal Party, and it would be. The drug lobby worked on the weaker side and got involved with the Labor Party.

This Government and Premier have done what they always do; that is, act for minorities. They have acted for the gays and lesbians, and for drug users and dealers. They are going to act for prostitutes. However, when it comes to mainstream issues about young people, parents, grandparents and families who want to bring up their kids in an environment free of drugs, and who look to a Premier and a Government to provide some moral support, they find that it is absolutely lacking in this Government, and the once again absent Premier. He does not even have the guts to be in this Chamber to defend his rotten policy and the performance of the Minister for

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Health, who should be working on health issues instead of facilitating an explosion in cannabis cultivation and supply to young people in Western Australia. The hypocrisy is absolutely amazing!

Where does the Labor Party sit with other policies? What is the point of a health minister making statements about restricting smoking in public places? What is the point of funding the Quit campaign when, at the same time, he is condoning cannabis use? What absolute hypocrisy! What is the point of running “Don’t drink and drive” campaigns, telling people not to speed or drink and drive, and promoting road safety when this minister is advocating a program that will see an increase in the use of cannabis by people driving on the roads? Members are shaking their heads. Figures will come up in this debate that will show that about half of the fatalities on Western Australian roads involve people who have cannabis in their bloodstreams. It is a bit more than a coincidence. However, this is not properly understood and not enough research has been done on the matter. Incredibly, even the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure said in the *Hansard* of 18 October 1995 that -

We need to let kids know that smoking marijuana is probably eight times as carcinogenic as smoking tobacco.

What an incredible admission. Perhaps she is in a position of knowledge but at least she admitted the potency of the cannabis around today. It is not what members in this House might have had a puff of in their university or younger days. It is not the same product. Even the Government in the Netherlands is reconsidering whether cannabis can be considered a soft drug because of the potency of the material now produced.

I will return to one of the other great lies of the four that were told when it was suggested that this legislation does nothing more than follow what the coalition had previously done. How many times have we seen the Minister for Health come into this Parliament and mislead members? It happens continuously. He has said, “All we are doing is extending the cautioning system. We are doing nothing more than what the coalition did.” That is simply untrue. The minister has only been here a couple of years. Does he know that he actually has to tell the truth in this place? It might be a new experience for him but he must tell the truth in this place. He is not on the beat now or with some of his mates who are fronting up at the royal commission. He is in Parliament and he is accountable.

Mr J.J.M. Bowler: Are you saying all police are corrupt?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I hope that the member speaks on the debate because this matter is a big issue in the mining industry.

What did the coalition do? It recognised that there was widespread use of cannabis amongst young people; 15 per cent of young people or perhaps more in certain demographic areas or age groups. We wanted to identify those young people and get them into an education program to help them through school and with intervention. We wanted to get them off drugs and give them the message, “Say no to drugs.” We wanted to fight drugs and not facilitate their use. We trialled a cautioning system, initially in the police districts of Mirrabooka and Bunbury, and then we extended it statewide. There are some significant differences between that approach and what this Government wants to do. The cautioning system under the coalition Government applied to first time offenders only. What Labor proposes under this Bill will apply to the first, second, third, fifty-ninth and one hundred and fifty-ninth offence; a person will be able to have an unlimited number of offences. There is no limit; it just goes on and on. There could even be multiple offences on a single day. Under the coalition policy an offender got one chance. That was realistic but firm. This Government’s policy is as soft as a marshmallow and it just goes on and on. Under the coalition the cautioning system did not apply to cultivation at all; there was no tolerance of cultivation. Under this legislation people can grow two plants. They might incur a fine, but it is unlikely because the police will not bother about it. If a person gets a fine he can send off the \$150 or whatever it might be. Big deal! It is exactly the same as a parking fine. It is not a penalty to anyone whatsoever. The coalition would not tolerate cultivation at all. The Labor Party now has a policy of tolerance of cultivation, and the police will tolerate it and let it go. Plants will be grown in increasing numbers across this State. There will be an enormous increase in the availability of cannabis, just as has happened in South Australia. If people were caught under the coalition’s cautioning system, they had to go to a mandatory education session; they had no choice. If they did not attend, they would receive a criminal conviction. They had one chance and they had to go to an education session. The education provision in this legislation is optional, not mandatory. A young kid who is caught spaced out on dope may say that he will turn up to the education session; however, he could forget about it and not turn up. When the same young kid is caught again the next day and told that he must attend the next education session, he will say that he will turn up, but, again, he will not. The defining difference is that the coalition Government did not decriminalise cannabis possession and cultivation, and would never have done. The Government’s legislation decriminalises both the possession and cultivation of cannabis. There is a world of difference between the coalition Government’s modest thought-out caution for one-time offenders - they received one chance - and the soft on drugs policy of this Government. This Labor Government is beholden to

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the drug reform lobby. However, that is a joke, because it is not a drug reform ; rather, it is about letting people grow and smoke their own cannabis without penalty. It is not about reform but about looking after a group in the community who want to be able to grow, sell, and smoke pot without fear of being caught or penalised. The drug lobby infiltrated the Labor Party and gained influence, and now the Government is delivering for it. Once again, Dr Gallop is governing for the minority interests, and in doing so, he is demonstrating that he does not give a damn about the widespread community or the basic values of Western Australian families. Again, I note that the Premier is not in the Chamber. The Premier will not show his face during this debate, but he is not paired. No members will be paired for so long as this Bill is before the House; therefore, there is no excuse for any member to be absent during question time or at any other stage.

Members on this side of the House will talk about a number of issues relating to the criminal aspects involved in this legislation and its policing. The Government's legislation will allow for people to be given an unlimited number of cautions. A person could be caught - in reality that will not happen because the police will not bother with such people - with up to 30 grams of cannabis. That is not a trivial amount. The expression "small amounts for personal use" has been used by the Premier and other government members. Thirty grams is not a small amount for personal use. Again, I will demonstrate what 30 grams of cannabis looks like. The sachet I am about to hold up does not contain cannabis, so the Leader of the House need not get excited. I have never seen the eyes of members opposite light up as quickly as they did when I produced a similar sachet earlier in the week.

Several opposition members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I hold up for the information of members a bag of parsley, which represents the volume of 30 grams of cannabis, the typical street value of which is about \$300. A chronic cannabis user smokes about 10 grams each week. The contents of the sachet represent three week's supply for a chronic heavy user and not a small amount for personal use. A heavy cigarette smoker may smoke two packets a day. I do not know if that is reasonable, because I do not smoke.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That would be pretty heavy.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If a reasonably heavy smoker smokes a packet a day, a three-week supply equates to 21 packets. Have members ever seen a smoker walk around with 21 packets of cigarettes in his pocket? Would a person just happen to have 21 packets on him as he walked down St Georges Terrace? This Government is saying that it is okay for people to walk around with 30 grams of cannabis, the value of which may be \$300.

I seek leave to lay on the Table for the remainder of this day's session, the plastic bag of 30 grams of look-alike cannabis, which is parsley. If members opposite raced off and smoked the pack of parsley that was placed on the Table the other day, they would be very aromatic.

[The sachet was tabled for the information of members.]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is how people buy cannabis, not how it is traded. Thirty grams of cannabis is a dealable quantity. We know that, because when I brought it into Parliament earlier this week, the Minister for Health accused me of being a dealer. I agree that if I had 30 grams of cannabis on me, I could be considered a dealer because that is a dealable quantity. However, the Government's legislation is decriminalising the use and cultivation of 30 grams. What would a person do with 30 grams? A dealer who is young and unemployed, or unemployable because he is on cannabis, may hang around schools after school finishes, but he will not sell the cannabis for \$300, because most school kids do not have that type of money. However, they may be able to rustle up \$25. A few school kids may get together and pay \$25 to buy one gram. Cannabis is smoked in what I understand to be a cone, which is put in the paraphernalia or the bong. One gram of cannabis provides about 15 cones. If five school kids each throw in \$5 to buy one gram - most kids would get that in pocket money - they can each have three smokes after school. The 18-year-old who can, without danger of criminal offence, break down 30 grams of cannabis into small amounts and sell it to school kids - they are the ones who will buy one gram or less - will make \$750. Why would that person work? Why would that person stand behind the counter at a Woolworths or Coles supermarket for \$12 or \$13 an hour when he can buy cannabis for \$300 and sell it to school kids for \$750? If government members do not think that that will happen, they are even more incompetent and naive than I thought.

I seek leave to lay on the Table for the remainder of this day's session the 30 sachets of single-gram cannabis equivalent and an indication of the price of 30 grams, which is \$750. I would appreciate it if members opposite do not steal it this time.

[The sachet was tabled for the information of members.]

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Mr M.J. Birney: What do you think would have happened if the Leader of the House had taken the bag down to the police station yesterday?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: He would have confirmed officers' opinion of him.

I have referred to the dealing side of the legislation and stated that 30 grams of cannabis is a dealable quantity. People could make a nice living from dealing 30 grams and this Government will facilitate that. Does the Government understand what it is doing to the young people in this State? There are already enough problems in the community with cannabis and drugs. The greatest fear of hundreds or thousands of parents is that their young kids will become involved with cannabis and other drugs, become dependent and depressed, and become part of the mental health system. Tragically, some may suicide. The Government is facilitating that. Does the member for Rockingham know whether any suicides in Rockingham are the result of cannabis use? Has he made any inquiries? If not, I will do the inquiries for him and find out what is happening in his electorate. The member for Rockingham should have already made those inquiries. I will make inquiries in all the electorates. Social groups, doctors, welfare organisations and charitable groups are all trying to cope with this enormous problem, and yet the Government is seeking to facilitate it. The absent Premier is leading the charge. He does not have young children any more, so perhaps this issue does not affect him personally. However, many members have young children or will have in the future. Thousands of young couples know what cannabis is about. They know what it does because either they or their friends have used it and they have seen first-hand what it does. They can also recognise when people are using it. They do not want their young children exposed to that. Where will the exposure and risk be the greatest? Ironically, it will be in the lower socioeconomic areas.

I refer to the growing and cultivation of cannabis, which is just as insidious. The legislation states that a person will be able to grow up to two plants. As opposition members will outline, there is no detail in the legislation about the size of those two plants. The only change is in relation to hydroponics, because the Opposition drew that issue to the Government's attention a year ago. A person can grow plants as big as an adult, a shrub or a small tree. Two plants could be harvested three times a year to produce two and a half kilograms of cannabis. A chronic heavy cannabis user will use 10 grams a week, which is 520 grams a year. Two plants can quite easily produce 2.5 kilograms - five times the amount a chronic cannabis user would consume. What would he do with the rest? Flush it down the toilet? Mulch it for future crops? Get real! He will trade it on the streets and target young children. There will be far more production than people will grow for simple personal use. Even without hydroponics, it is arguable that a plant can be grown that would produce 10 or 11 times that amount.

The links between crime and cannabis have been raised in Parliament before and they will be raised again. There is more evidence. In South Australia this policy has been a disaster for young people, and there has been an enormous increase in organised crime. The South Australian Premier, Mike Rann, said that cannabis syndicates were operating under the three-plant limit in that State. Why will they not work under the two-plant limit in this State? It will make no difference. South Australia is a cannabis production area for Melbourne and Sydney. The "Australian Illicit Drug Report 2001-2002" states -

The growing involvement of organised crime in the trading of cannabis for other illicit drugs holds the greatest resource implications for law enforcement agencies.

That is important. I will repeat it: "the greatest resource implications for law enforcement agencies". Where is the Minister for Police? The "Australian Illicit Drug Report" states that last year the greatest challenge for funding and resourcing the police is trade of cannabis for other drugs. The Government is facilitating that. We already have police shortages in this State. Police are under huge pressure, and now the Government is adding to their greatest resource challenge. Cannabis is a currency. It is traded. People grow cannabis for cash, but more often they use it to get other drugs, such as amphetamines. Then they trade those. It is a cottage industry. When crack cocaine spread through New York in the early 1990s, the law enforcement bodies at that time said that the spread must have been due to the Mr Big dealers, because crack cocaine had spread through New York in the space of two or three weeks. They went looking for the Mr Bigs, and they could not find them. The cannabis dealers on every second street corner simply swapped from dealing cannabis to dealing crack cocaine. There were no Mr Bigs to be found. Within two weeks, crack cocaine was the preferred drug in New York. There were no syndicates; it simply filtered through the existing cottage industry - the individual dealers of the cannabis system. Crack cocaine is not very common in this State at this stage, although it is internationally. I fear crack cocaine will come here and will be distributed by exactly the same people who are growing and distributing cannabis. That is the scenario now being set up by the Government for young people and young families in this State. The former head of the Victorian police drug squad, John McCoy, said that intelligence reports indicated that marijuana laws are used by gangs to buy harder drugs in Melbourne and Sydney. Is the Government so stupid that it does not think that this Bill is an open invitation to drug dealers, organised crime and the proliferation of both cannabis and other drugs in this community? The Government should not be so stupid and irresponsible.



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Home invasions have doubled in South Australia over the years 1990 to 2000. Over 10 per cent are related to so-called rip-offs, as one group tries to steal cannabis from another. Evidence of the relationship between cannabis and all sorts of crimes is overwhelming. "Drug Use Monitoring in Australia: 2002 annual report on drug use among police detainees" showed that 65 per cent of males arrested for violent crimes tested positive for cannabis use. This is an extraordinary statistic. Two out of three males arrested for violent crimes had cannabis in their systems. This is not the bit of cannabis for personal use, or having a puff with mates and strumming a guitar on a Friday night. Can members believe that? It is an overwhelming statistic.

Other members will talk about health. The implications for physical health are very damaging - cancer and respiratory problems. What is the point of supporting programs to prevent smoking or to support programs to reduce heart disease and cancer? Why support breast screening? All of them are worthy programs, but what is the point of having a public health program in those areas when at the same time the Government is giving out the message that a little bit of cannabis is okay and that people can grow and smoke their own? The Government is discrediting every public health program and every health provider in this State. Hospitals, doctors and nurses who work tirelessly to deal with health problems in our community are being let down, ironically by the Minister for Health, who should be the person in this Parliament arguing against this legislation. He should not be the person introducing it. He is damaging the one thing he is charged with doing - looking after the health of the citizens of this State. He has produced a piece of legislation that on irrefutable, overwhelming evidence will damage the health of people in Western Australia. He deserves to be removed from the health portfolio for that reason alone. He is failing in his sworn responsibility.

Mr M.J. Birney: There are a few other reasons for removing him.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There are plenty of others, but I would settle for that one.

The implications for mental health are probably the most disturbing. The member for Murdoch will talk about that in more detail. There is no doubt about the effects of cannabis as a depressant causing anxiety, schizophrenia and suicide. What will the Minister for Health say to the next parents who lose a child through suicide resulting from cannabis use? That a little bit is okay? Will he front up to them? Many parents and families have suffered the agony of the loss of a son or daughter through suicide related to cannabis use. Tragically, it is not a rare occurrence. More young people will use cannabis, become dependent, suffer mental health problems and enter the mental health system, and there will probably be more suicides. Certainly we will see the loss of lives, if not in a literal sense, then as a result of people being unemployable, directionless in life, involved in petty crime, split from their families, without friends, lonely and isolated in our community. I do not care if it is only one; that is reason enough. If only one life is lost, or one young person loses his or her way in life, it would be reason enough to oppose this legislation, but it will be more than that. There will be tens, hundreds and probably thousands. That is the consequence.

The Labor Party is trying to portray cannabis as a soft drug - a social drug with no connection to hard drugs. A report from the *British Journal of Psychiatry* for April 2003 - very recent - found that the progression from adolescent cannabis use to dependence in young adulthood is strong. Whether or not young people progress from cannabis to amphetamines or heroin, adolescents will experiment with the use of cannabis, and there is a strong association between that use, as adolescents, and dependence in early adulthood. When they acquire that dependence and continue use in early adulthood, all the mental health problems, the crime problems and the other problems happen. It is not a casual thing, of having the odd puff. It does not work that way. Thousands of people out there in families know from bitter personal experience and personal tragedy that it does not work that way.

Studies done by Professor Sven Silburn of the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research found that cannabis was detected in 20 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females aged between 15 and 24 who committed suicide. Cannabis was found in the bodies of one in five male suicides. That is not a small proportion; it is a strong association. There might be all sorts of reasons that a young person tragically takes his life. One in five males had cannabis in his body at the time. The Minister for Health should not pretend to care about young people and the dangers of cannabis use. He should not make emotive, caring speeches about youth suicide ever again. I do not take him seriously. He should not pretend to care about youth suicide when he is doing something that will contribute to and exacerbate the problem. Nowhere is youth suicide more of a problem than in country Western Australia. Anecdotal evidence shows that the use of drugs, particularly cannabis, is probably far more prevalent in country areas. Cannabis tends to be more widely used in relatively low socioeconomic areas. The Minister for Health is not even looking after his own patch, if that is who he purports to represent.

Not enough research has been conducted on the effects of cannabis use and road safety. More research must be done. In May 1996, the Western Australian Task Force on Drug Abuse found that cannabis was detected in 48

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per cent of road fatalities during the period between July 1992 and December 1995. That is a very substantial figure. Of the road fatalities in this State, one in two people had cannabis in their systems.

Mr P.D. Omodei: It is only 11 o'clock. Where have all the Labor members gone? It is not lunchtime yet.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I refer to work safety. Members may not know that cannabis is retained in the body for far longer periods than alcohol, for example. A person can smoke cannabis on a Friday night, rock up to work the following Monday and fail a urine test for cannabis. He may not physically feel the effects a couple of days later, but the cannabis is still in his system. One of the effects of cannabis use, which is not properly understood, is that it can result in a sudden loss of coordination. That can occur some time after smoking it. Suddenly a person might lose his psychomotor coordination and stumble. People have died on country roads because they hit the edge of the road. How many of those deaths might be related to a sudden loss of coordination, and how many might be because people had cannabis in their systems? I do not think research has even been done to determine that. However, I suspect it might be a significant number.

It is no coincidence that companies, particularly mining companies in this State, have a zero tolerance policy towards cannabis. Not so long ago mining companies turned a blind eye to cannabis use. They now conduct random urine testing frequently. Why do they do that? They do that because many of their employees operate large pieces of machinery or work underground. People who use cannabis place themselves and their fellow workers at risk if they have cannabis in their systems. The mining companies have applied a zero tolerance policy. What is this Government doing? It is saying that a bit of cannabis use is okay.

I refer to education programs. The ministerial working party following the Community Drug Summit recommended that some \$292 000 be spent on an intensive education campaign over four weeks. What a joke! What is the Government doing? It is introducing a law that says it is okay to have 30 grams of cannabis and grow a couple of plants. Just to make up for that, the Government will spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars over four weeks to say that it did not mean it. What type of message is the Government trying to send? How does that compare with the \$2.83 million that the Government spent on the Quit campaign? What type of signal does that send to our young children with regard to health?

The previous Government's school drug education program was well researched. A number of different agencies and professionals put a lot of work into it. Rhonda Parker did an excellent job setting it up. That program was supported by the schools, the then Minister for Youth, all other members and me. It worked well in the schools. It gave the schools a program to deliver to young people. It involved and educated them. It worked from kindergarten to year 12. Different information was provided to young people, depending on their year levels, all the way through school to make them aware of the issues involved. What is the point of that now? What will happen to that program? Teachers in my electorate have said to me that I must do something about the Government's proposal. Kids aged 12, 13 and 14 are saying that the teachers have told them not to use drugs including cannabis, but the Premier and the Government is saying that it is okay; therefore, the teachers must be wrong. Parents are being told the same thing.

The one thing a Premier of this State should do is support decent people in our community to raise their children. That is the one thing this Premier fails to do. He is still absent. He has shown no leadership or support for young people and young families or for health in this State - none whatsoever. He is still absent. He has not shown his face after 55 minutes of debate on this Bill. Will we ever see him? I do not think we will. He is running faster than Saddam's Republican Guard.

Mr A.D. Marshall: He cannot blame the federal Government this time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Premier will just slide away like a snake. He will run for cover because that is the sort of person he is. He is a snake in the grass when it comes to this issue.

I refer to an article that appeared in the *Evening Standard*, which is a London newspaper, on Monday, 17 June 2002. It refers to a trial by the Blair Government in a working class area of London called Lambeth where a similar cannabis policy was trialled. I quote from Julie Fawcett, a youth worker in Stockwell, who states -

"Working-class children are being turned into stoned, imbecilic illiterate criminals"

Dr Clare Gerada, a general practitioner practising in the same place states -

"They've got the message that suddenly it's all right, that the police won't do anything to them"

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Mike Fuller states -

"One of the problems of children taking cannabis is that it brings them into contact with dealers"

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Ros Griffiths, a Brixton resident, said -

“This experiment is madness. The police have lost the war and they have handed the streets over to the bad guys”

That is what is happening in Lambeth under a policy similar to the one this Government has proposed. Members might think those people are Conservative-Liberal supporters; however, they are not. They are from a working-class area. They are poor people, single mothers, police officers and community workers. If government members still do not believe me, I will provide a quote from a Labour MP, Kate Hoey, from the same article, which states -

Labour MP Kate Hoey, whose Vauxhall constituency takes in most of Brixton, has campaigned hard against the Lambeth cannabis policy. She said: “I have been to meeting after meeting, and listened to the despair of people whose lives are blighted by drugs. But no one is listening.

“Why can’t the police see the message that this policy is sending out? People here are fed up with being guinea pigs. They really have had enough.”

People are saying that the kids in Lambeth in the Brixton area are being used as guinea pigs. Other comments that have been made include the statement that the Blair Government is using trendy, middle-class policies on working-class kids and treating them as guinea pigs. Julie Fawcett is a single mum who also had drug problems with cannabis in her early days and is now battling to bring up her kids in a working-class area. I will repeat what she said -

“Working-class children are being turned into stoned, imbecilic illiterate criminals”

The photo accompanying the article shows a pair of 10 and 11-year-old children in a park who are stoned out of their minds early in the morning. These are not 17 or 18-year-old children. The Government is talking about the availability of drugs that will spread to all primary aged children. It is an appalling policy. The Liberal Party will totally oppose this Bill: we will oppose it in this Chamber; we will oppose it in the next Chamber; and we will oppose it in every electorate in the State. As I said at the beginning of my speech, there are no pairs in this Chamber. Every government member will have the opportunity to vote. I expect every one of them to state to his or her electorate his or her personal view of this irresponsible policy of the Gallop Government to decriminalise the possession of cannabis and to allow the cultivation of up to two plants in the backyards and back lanes of Perth suburbs and country towns.

**MR M.F. BOARD** (Murdoch) [11.11 am]: I will be dealing with the health aspects of the Bill. Before I do that it is important that I address a number of issues which are known to this House and to the community but which I want to put on the record so that people understand fully why I oppose the Bill and why I stand in support of my colleagues in the Liberal Party.

Some people in this place might find my involvement in a company that retailed smoking paraphernalia throughout Western Australia and, indeed, Australia inconsistent with the position I hold today. My position is very consistent. I have moved on as a person from a company that I joined when I was in my twenties; I am now in my fifties. The company that I bought into at the time was primarily a clothing company that imported a large amount of clothing from Indonesia and India. It also imported a whole range of jewellery, brassware, pottery and other goods that in the early 1970s were very popular, particularly in Australia. Clothing was subject to a quota in those days, and the company was lucky enough to hold a quota when the quota system was brought in. As a result, we not only retailed clothing but also wholesaled clothing primarily in the eastern States. The company grew. Over a period of about eight years we ran something like 20 retail outlets throughout Australia. They were primarily shops, but there were also some market stalls. The bulk of them dealt with clothing. I also owned confectionery stores, chocolate stores, copper and brass shops and pottery stores. As a result, I was fairly extensively involved in retail. It is true to say that some of our stores sold smoking paraphernalia, and a wide range at that.

I am not particularly proud of the fact that I was involved in that company and, as I have previously explained to the House, it is something that I regret. I felt at the time that it was a reasonable business decision to make because it was not illegal. I was a smoker of cigarettes in those days, as were many people. I thought that the law on the smoking of cannabis would follow the practice in the United States and Europe and it would become legal in this country. I thought that our business decision was getting us ahead of the game and that we were being proactive. Many of the States in America had moved at that time to not only decriminalise but also legalise the possession of marijuana in small quantities - so, too, had European countries. In New South Wales in the 1970s many debates took place about the decriminalisation of marijuana. At the time I thought decriminalisation would be inevitable.

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Looking back, I realise that was an error of judgment. Had I known at the time that I would be in public life and the extent of the proliferation of the drug and the way in which it has become harmful because of the toxic levels it contains as a result of the cultivation of the plant, I would have made different decisions. I cannot withdraw from those decisions. They are not ones of which I am particularly proud, but I must cop on the chin the embarrassment and the accusations that come with it, and I am prepared to accept that.

I recall that prior to the 1996 state election, the story broke on the front page of *The West Australian* that a potential minister - I was a backbencher at the time - was linked to a drug cult. That was very hurtful, particularly two weeks prior to the election. It did not stop me winning the election; in fact, I believe my majority remained fairly steady. I believe that I went on to become a successful Minister for Youth and I held other portfolios. I have always tried to show determination and to put some poor decisions behind me.

Some of the difficulties that have arisen in Parliament as a result of that have been embarrassing to me and my family, particularly to my children. We wear that because it is part of the adversarial nature of Parliament and the way in which the game is played. I fully appreciate and understand that. I am prepared to accept the criticism and the embarrassment that goes with it. However, I want to deal with where we are at today. I am now in my fifties and I have children. I accept the fact that I have moved on, as many of us have. I was never a smoker of marijuana, although I am on record as having tried it only once.

Mr M.P. Whitely: You said that you tried it once. Do you think that you deserve to have a criminal record?

Mr M.F. BOARD: The Liberal Party is not about trying to give someone a criminal record for trying marijuana. We have never wanted to do that, nor have we tried to encourage it.

Mr M.P. Whitely: I do not think that you should have a criminal record.

Mr M.F. BOARD: Let me explain further where we sit with it. We have never tried to lock people up for trying marijuana. The cautioning system did not allow for that.

My children have grown older; in fact, my daughter only recently married. When we look at this issue today, we can see that a number of things have changed significantly from the 1970s and early 1980s. We have a great deal more information now than we had at that time. A large number of people have stopped smoking cigarettes as a result of the great amount of information that has come forward over the past 20 to 30 years. The same case can be made for cannabis. It is no longer something we can consider to be a soft drug. Because of the way in which the plants are grown and the strength of cannabis now compared to that of 20 or 30 years ago, the reality is that it has much greater effects on the health of individuals, particularly young people.

In my contribution to this debate today I want particularly to deal with the health effects of cannabis. The Drug Advisory Council of Australia has seven main objectives that it supports. They read -

- . A drug free Australia
- . The elimination of the harm from illicit drug use
- . The illegality of illicit drugs
- . The scientific evidence that marijuana is a harmful and dangerous drug and must remain illicit
- . The suppression of the supply of illicit drugs
- . A national campaign to say no to illicit drugs
- . Diversion of illicit drug users into detoxification and rehabilitation by court order and supervision

The Liberal Party opposes this Bill not because we have our heads in the sand about the use of cannabis and the difficulties faced as a result of that use, particularly by young people, but because we believe that the way in which the Government is dealing with the control of marijuana and cannabis use - this Bill is about control - sends the wrong messages to young people and the community about the use of cannabis today. I will indicate why that is the case.

Another e-mail from the Drug Advisory Council of Australia is headed "Cannabis gateway to other drugs". That was not considered to be the case 30 years ago, but now it has been proven that cannabis is a gateway drug. The e-mail states -

A major Australia study of young people has found a clear link between early use of cannabis and progression to other illicit drugs.

The study of twins indicated that a twin who had used cannabis by age 17, was 2 to 5 times more likely to use other drugs than a co-twin that had not used cannabis.

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The conclusion was that early access and use of cannabis may reduce perceived barriers against the use of other illegal drugs and if this disobedient behaviour is not checked, it ESCALATES.

Governments weakening laws against cannabis possession are making access extremely easy and increasing cannabis addiction.

Increased use of psychoactive and addictive drugs will have an escalation of social and health consequences for our young people.

Cannabis is now a major cause of drug related medical and psychiatric emergency room episodes.

That study was conducted by the Drug Advisory Council of Australia. In a further e-mail, headed "Cannabis is dangerous", it went on to say -

Medical research undertaken by the British Lung Foundation confirms that smoking cannabis leads to cancers of the tongue, larynx and lungs.

The research reveals that cannabis is worse than tobacco in its cancerous effects.

The Foundation disclosed that cannabis cigarettes are much stronger than those of the 1960's and 1970's so the cancerous effects will also be worse.

Three cannabis joints a day cause the same damage to the lining of the airways as 20 tobacco cigarettes.

Cannabis cigarettes contain 50% more cancer causing agents than tobacco cigarettes according to the Foundation.

Evidence has shown that there is a clear link between cannabis use and increased rates of cancer, particularly among young people. The Minister for Health, in his second reading speech, stated on 20 March that -

There is clear scientific evidence that cannabis use is associated with the risk of significant harm to a user's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Indeed, in 1995 the now Minister for Planning and Infrastructure said that we needed to let our kids know that marijuana was probably eight times as carcinogenic as tobacco when smoked. Information published in 2000 by the South Australian Police and the Drug and Alcohol Services Council stated that regular use of cannabis may contribute to a probable increase in the risk of cancers of the lung, mouth and throat. Dr Jan Copeland, a senior lecturer at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, has confirmed that cannabis has more toxins and tar than tobacco. The list goes on. The British Lung Foundation also found that concentrations of tar was "up to 50% higher in the smoke of a cannabis cigarette". Respiratory problems have been outlined by both the British Lung Foundation and the South Australian Police and the Drug and Alcohol Services Council. Further information published by South Australian Police and the Drug and Alcohol Services Council stated that regular use of cannabis may contribute to wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath and emphysema. Reproductive problems have also been found in recent studies.

There are other effects, particularly on mental health. The Leader of the Opposition spent some time dealing with mental health issues. Depression and anxiety is a significant contributor to suicides among young people in Western Australia. A study conducted over seven years by the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne and released in February 2002 found that cannabis use was linked with depression and anxiety in youth. Professor George Patton, Director of the Centre for Adolescent Health at the hospital, has said that this is the best evidence yet that cannabis is bad for mental health and causes higher rates of depression and anxiety problems. He said that there was a strong association between cannabis use and mental health problems. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* found a strong relationship between adolescent drug use and the experience of emotional distress, depression and a lack of sense of purpose in life. In terms of psychosis, about eight different reports have come forward over the past three or four years indicating a strong link between the use of marijuana and the development of psychosis. There is now clear evidence that regular use of cannabis causes dependency.

On the issue of suicide and self-harm, Professor Sven Silburn, whom we all know in this Chamber, of the Western Australian Research Institute for Child Health and the National Advisory Council on Youth Suicide Prevention, found that smoking marijuana more than 50 times a year could double the chances of a youth committing suicide. That is a significant figure. People wonder about the link between the increased youth suicide rate in Western Australia, which is the highest rate per head of population in Australia, and the use of marijuana. According to Professor Silburn's findings, cannabis was detected in 20 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females aged between 15 and 24 who committed suicide between 1986 and 1998. He also found strong suggestive evidence that regular cannabis use could trigger forms of psychosis latent in vulnerable individuals. Professor Silburn concluded that cannabis independently accounts for a sizeable proportion of all suicide attempts. A number of studies have also been undertaken in Sweden and the United States, particularly on

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suicide and its relationship with cannabis use. Some studies have suggested that up to 45 per cent of first suicide attempts could theoretically be attributed to cannabis use.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr M.F. BOARD: That is a telling figure. The Drug Advisory Council sent out a special memo by e-mail to members of Parliament in March this year headed "Cannabis link to teen suicides". The memo quotes an article in the *Sunday Times* of 7 October 2001 that outlined research on the link between cannabis use and an increase in the number of suicides. The e-mail states -

Main points of the article are -

1. Smoking cannabis more than 50 times a year ie. once a week, could double the chances of youths committing suicide according to Prof. Silburn a member of the Youth Suicide Advisory Committee of W.A.
2. Because cannabis is easily available and existing legislation offers little deterrence the present policies are NOT working.

We recognised that there were difficulties with that. The e-mail continues -

3. Of the 572 suicides of 15 to 24 year olds in W.A. illicit drugs were present in one third of males and one quarter of females.
4. Prof. Silburn recommended prevention and early intervention to stop young people using cannabis and committing suicide.
5. There needs to be more services for young people with clinically significant health and substance disorders.

I will deal with the legislation, because the Government has made it clear that it does not intend to legalise or decriminalise the use of marijuana. I accept that it is not the Government's intention. However, the reality of what it is doing is that it is sending a message to young people and the community that the growing and use of marijuana will be tolerated more by this Government.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Is it the member's view that this Bill decriminalises marijuana?

Mr M.F. BOARD: My view is that the Government is saying it is not trying to decriminalise marijuana, but it is sending out a message to the community that makes it appear that it is decriminalising marijuana.

Mr R.C. Kucera: It is important that your view is put on the record.

Mr M.F. BOARD: I understand that. I am happy to put a number of things on the record because I am trying to deal with this in an open way. The reality is that there is a general feeling in the community that this legislation is designed to create greater tolerance and acceptance of the growing and use of marijuana in people's homes. The Government has not clarified what constitutes a home or a plant. That is the message given to the community and young people.

Mr R.C. Kucera: That is the message given by your party.

Mr M.F. BOARD: No. The minister has to look only at his own legislation. There is a big difference between the cautioning regime that the coalition Government brought in - which dealt with the difficult issue of first-time users and not locking up people or ruining their lives for having tried marijuana - and making a quantum leap to allow people to be in possession of 30 grams of marijuana or grow it at any time on a repetitive basis and be subject to nothing worse than a fine. It could be that person is fined twice in a month or four times every few months. For someone who is either growing or using marijuana on a heavy basis -

Mr R.C. Kucera: It still remains an offence.

Mr M.F. BOARD: The legislation softens the situation.

Mr R.C. Kucera: No.

Mr M.F. BOARD: Yes, it does. The main difference is with second, third and fourth offences. That is the difference between cautioning, when a person has to go to court or accept mandatory counselling and drug rehabilitation, and using a system of fines in which people can be fined on a regular basis. It is definitely a softening of the situation. In no way did the coalition's regime allow people to grow plants or be subject to only a fine. People were subject to immediate arrest and court action. By telling people they can now grow plants the Government is definitely moving down the road of softening the offence and promoting tolerance. That is the message given to young people. That is why the Opposition violently opposes this Bill. The long-term effect

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will be that many more houses will contain marijuana plants. There will be much more marijuana available, whether it be for sale or personal use. The Government may think that by introducing this legislation people will not have to deal with drug dealers or people who profit from growing large amounts of marijuana. I hope the Government's strategy is effective; I hope it is able to do that. The reverse is that the Government may be encouraging a much larger number of people to become involved in growing and dealing in marijuana on a small basis. Instead of having the Mr Bigs, the Government will have 500 smaller dealers running around. That will increase the proliferation of marijuana in our community, especially among young people. That is the danger of what the Government is doing. That is what happened in South Australia and why the Opposition is opposed to this legislation. The Government is dealing with a difficult issue the wrong way. It is capitulating to an industry that wants to soften the use of marijuana and not have to deal with the harsh realities. The industry does not want to have marijuana use stopped.

There is an issue I wanted to mention earlier. I spoke about my relationship to a company involved in the selling of smoking paraphernalia. After the 1996 election, when I became a minister of the Crown, I was approached by the then Premier to see if I wanted to head up the drug strategy as the responsible minister. I thought about it long and hard but I told the Premier that it was not in the interests of the Government or the party for two reasons. The first was that I was the Minister for Youth and I did not believe it was just a youth issue. Secondly, I thought I would be a soft target for the Opposition at the time and that it would single me out and somehow try to embarrass the Government because of my previous association with the company. As a result, I declined the offer. When the now Minister for Health became responsible for the Government's drug strategy, I made a similar decision. I believe it was in the interests of the Liberal Party and the Opposition that its strong stance be maintained and that it should involve someone who was "carrying baggage" and could be singled out and hurt by the Government of the day. I accept that. I must also place on record that this is not just a health issue. This issue runs across a range of portfolios including community development, policing, young people and the social fabric of our community. Members of the Opposition have mentioned the effects on health in their speeches today. It is also a family issue. On talkback radio yesterday, many parents described what their lives are like having a family member who is dependent on cannabis. Such individuals have large mood swings that affect their family life, and their financial and social situations. Families have been broken up by people addicted to marijuana.

The Opposition has appointed Hon Simon O'Brien, a member of the other place, to head up the Opposition's drug strategy. It is such a large issue that the Opposition felt it needed to be treated that way. I support totally the position of the Opposition and the Liberal Party. I have learnt from issues I have been involved with. I accept criticism on the chin for that; we all move forward. With the knowledge we have from studies undertaken and expert advice from around the world, anything we do that makes our community perceive that there has been a softening of attitude towards the possession and use of cannabis is not sending the right message. It is certainly not the right way to go for Western Australia.

**MR A.D. MARSHALL** (Dawesville) [11.39 am]: This legislation to decriminalise cannabis is a disgrace. I wholeheartedly oppose it. I place on record that I am very disappointed that the Premier is not here to listen to this debate, because I consider this to be one of the major debates in which this Government has been involved. Over 11 years in this Parliament I have seen controversial debates. I believe this debate is the most passionate and controversial.

I have a feeling that the Premier is not happy with this issue. He is either running away from it and putting his head in the sand or has not worked in with the Leader of the House, because the Leader of the House should have ensured that when this legislation was called on - one of the most important and most talked-about pieces of legislation in the community - the Premier would be in this place to listen to the debate. I am extremely disappointed that the leader of this State is not present to hear some of the opinions of the people of Western Australia on a matter of so much importance. This Government is supposedly listening to the people of Western Australia, but the Premier does not have the time to be here to do just that.

At the moment one-third of the teenagers who smoke cannabis at least once a week will become dependent on the drug by their early twenties. While 60 per cent of people are reported to have experimented with marijuana, the risk of dependence is much higher for regular users. To allow people to grow cannabis in their backyards will accelerate this dependence on the drug. Some months ago, in a jovial manner in a debate in this Parliament, government members were challenged to say whether they had tried cannabis. All rather sheepishly said no. Therefore, I am surprised that this Government should go against all public opinion and still want to decriminalise the cultivation of cannabis - which, by the way, is a more serious offence than possessing it.

There is no reason for this legislation. As a grandfather, I am extremely concerned. I slept overnight in Perth, and at 6.30 am today two of my grandchildren came knocking at the door. I read a nursery rhyme to my three-year-old grand-daughter Abby. Then I played cricket with my five-year-old grandson Tom. That was at their

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East Fremantle residence. I took off at 7.10 am to go to Mt Claremont, where I sang along with Matilda, my four-year-old grand-daughter, and also played hidey with my 11-month-old grandson Charlie. Then I drove to Parliament. Oh for the innocence of grandchildren! However, what kind of future are we developing for them with this kind of legislation? I shudder to think. One of Abraham Lincoln's famous nine points of wisdom states -

You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.

This legislation will surely take away the initiative and independence of certain members of our community.

I know this Labor Government proudly boasts that it promoted the Community Drug Summit to canvass opinions on drugs and continually quotes from the Prior report. However, what the Government promotes can be easily negated; in fact, it can be negated with interest. I will quote from an article provided by the New South Wales Parliamentary Library Research Service. This issue was examined in a strong manner in New South Wales, similar to the way in which it was examined by the Drug Summit. I will tell the House what was found in New South Wales. I have with me briefing paper No 11 of 1999. One document states -

**Use of smoked marijuana - findings and recommendations:** Due to the health risks associated with smoking, the IOM -

That is the Institute of Medicine -

report concluded that smoked marijuana should generally not be recommended for long-term medical use. Smoking is a poor drug delivery system, in part because of the harmful substances it delivers to the body, but also because cannabis plants contain a variable mixture of biologically active compounds and cannot, therefore, be expected to provide a precisely defined drug effect. If there is any future in cannabinoid drugs, it lies with agents of more certain, not less certain composition.

We are dealing with a dangerous drug. I will continue to quote from the document titled "The Medical Use of Cannabis: Recent Developments". On the risks associated with the medical use of marijuana, it states -

... 'The most contentious aspect of the medical marijuana debate is not whether marijuana can alleviate particular symptoms, but rather the degree of harm associated with its use'. The report then summarises the harmful effects of marijuana to the individual and, to a lesser extent, to society ...

I am quoting extracts from a thousand-page report. I will quote what it states under the heading "Toxic Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: Review of the Evidence" -

.8 Analysis of blood samples from road traffic fatalities in 1996-97 (the results of the first 15 months of a three year ... study ... showed that 8 per cent of the victims were positive for cannabis, including 10 per cent of the victims who were driving.

This Government has no way of ensuring that those people whom it is encouraging to use cannabis will not take to our roads and endanger their own lives and the lives of other motorists. Another extract states -

It is difficult to see how cannabis intoxication could be monitored, if its use were permitted. There could be no equivalent of the breathalyser for alcohol, since small amounts of cannabis continue to be released from fat into the blood long after any short-term impairment has worn off ...

It continues -

A single dose of cannabis for an inexperienced user, or an overdose for an habitual user, can sometimes induce a variety of intensely unpleasant psychic effects including anxiety, panic, paranoia and feelings of impending doom ... These adverse reactions are sometimes referred to as a "whitey" as the subject may become unusually pallid ...

They are some quotes from a document provided by the New South Wales Parliamentary Library Research Service. I will carry on to deal with the toxic effects of cannabis and again quote from the document -

In some instances cannabis use may lead to a longer-lasting toxic psychosis involving delusions and hallucinations ...

It also states -

Cannabis can have untoward long-term effects on cognitive performance, i.e. the performance of the brain, particularly in heavy users. These have been reviewed for us by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal Society.

I do not know whether the forum had any of that information. However, this is the real thing; this is proper research from a State that is much larger than Western Australia. It has examined this issue and rejected it. The document states -



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While users may show little or no impairment in simple tests of short-term memory, they show significant impairments in tasks that require more complex manipulation of learned material . . .

This document is publicly available. It should raise awareness. People are told not to smoke marijuana because it will affect their health. Now this State Labor Government wants to pass legislation that will encourage people to smoke cannabis and suffer all these health impairments. However, there is more. The document further states -

“There are a few case reports of malformations following marijuana use in pregnancy.

Therefore, if a woman smokes marijuana while in a pregnant state, there are a few case reports of malformations. The document states further -

Regular cannabis smokers suffer from an increased incidence of respiratory disorders, including cough,

Did I hear the Leader of the House coughing? To continue -

bronchitis and asthma.

I know that a cough cannot be recorded in *Hansard*. However, the Leader of the House was coughing then, and I am extremely concerned about him. When he grabbed that parsley off the table when he thought it was the real stuff I was concerned, and now that he is coughing I am absolutely sure I should be worried about the Leader of the House.

The document continues -

Microscopic examination of the cells lining the airways of cannabis smokers has revealed the presence of an inflammatory response and some evidence for what may be pre-cancerous changes.

Many concerns are raised in this report from New South Wales.

The definitions of dependence are important. If an athlete of any note had been listening to this debate, he would probably have shuddered to learn about the consequences of being involved with such a drug. The document states -

The consumption of any psychoactive drug, legal or illegal, can be thought of as comprising three stages: use, abuse, and addiction.

For former members of the Police Force, those three words roll off their tongues because they were taught and trained to stop the use of drugs in our State, because once people start taking drugs, there is use, then abuse and, most fateful of all, addiction. The members opposite who are young parents and who train and hit balls with their children and want to see them do well, would not want their children to even experiment with cannabis. Once they do, parents can never be sure when, after the use, the abuse and the addiction will take over. This is what makes me so passionately against this legislation. I want the young people of Australia to continue to be free thinking and adventurous and to be leaders. I do not want them to be under the control of cannabis that they were encouraged to use by their next-door neighbour who had a couple of plants growing and said, “I have some apples growing; you can have some apples. The parsley is growing pretty well too, madam, so have some parsley. Oh, and there’s some dope growing over there; help yourself to that as well.” That is the Australian way of life; we share. Why would someone not share the produce off the tree in the backyard?

Mr C.J. Barnett: You can imagine the frustration for parents who keep their kids away from cannabis only to find that their neighbours are growing it under a policy of tolerance. How can you stop your own little kids from taking it when it is being grown next door?

Mr A.D. MARSHALL: I will take that interjection because I want it recorded. When I was a kid, boys did not grow hairs on their chest and become men until they swam the river. They had to swim the river from Melville to the sugar refinery and when they came back, they got their colours. Where are we now 50 or 60 years later? Kids will now say, “Hey listen mate, I am going next door to try the cannabis. Dad reckons it is pretty good. Let us have a go at it. We are going to be men if we smoke this cannabis.” We are right back where we used to be. This Government is encouraging the use, the abuse and then the addiction to cannabis through this stupid legislation. The article provided by the New South Wales Parliamentary Library Research Service continues -

Each stage is marked by higher levels of drug use and increasingly serious consequences . . . The most influential current system of diagnosis is that published by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV, 1994). This uses the terms substance dependence instead of addiction, and defines this as a

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cluster of symptoms indicating that the individual continues to use the substance despite significant substance-related problems.

Further on in the article paragraph 4.26 states -

The Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence likewise conclude that, while physical dependence is rare, "Regular users can come to feel a psychological need for the drug or may rely on it as a "social lubricant": it is not unknown for people to use cannabis so frequently that they are almost constantly under the influence"

It is disturbing to read these results. It does not relate to those with commonsense, but it relates to those that the Labor Government says it represents: the underprivileged, the under-educated and the people who do not have much finance or have no-one independent to advise or help them. They are the people who will be caught in the trap of use and abuse.

I would like to quote more of the article because it is not often I get up in this House after having used the Parliamentary Library and read extensively. The more I read the research about the use of cannabis, the more disturbed I became. I want to share some of these quotes with the thousands of people who read *Hansard*. They will then know, as I have learnt, that one should simply not touch cannabis, get involved with it or be encouraged to grow it. Paragraph 4.29 of the article states -

Another measure of the extent of cannabis dependence is the number of people who seek treatment for it. Department of Health figures (1996) show that in 6 per cent of all contacts with regional drug clinics cannabis was the main drug of misuse . . . A similar figure, that cannabis users constitute 7 per cent of all new admissions to the drug treatment centres in Australia . . .

That is also a worry. In 1996 six per cent of all contacts with regional drug clinics were using it, but one year later, seven per cent of all new admissions in New South Wales had started using cannabis in the past 12 months. That report was written in 1996. It is now 2003 and we are in trouble. That percentage is going up and this Labor Government's decision will encourage people to grow cannabis. It is an absolutely shameful decision.

I know why the Premier is not here to listen to this. I think he is a pretty self-righteous person. Goodness gracious me, he is a Rhodes scholar! He is educated and has read many books. I believe that he is ashamed to be here today because he does not want to be a part of this. He has his head in the sand. He has bowed to the minority groups and pushed this legislation forward and is now saying, "I have done my duty and got the legislation up, I will now leave it to the Minister for Health to destroy himself by taking over and I will try to get out of it." But he will not get out of it because the public knows what this is all about. The Premier should not underestimate the clear thinkers of Western Australia; they will return. Just as this Government is trying to destroy the youth of this State by encouraging them to have a go with cannabis, the public of Western Australia will destroy this Government in two years when it goes back to vote. That will be the one that gets this Government.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr A.D. MARSHALL: The article from which I quoted previously also states in paragraph 4.33 that -

It is therefore clear that cannabis causes psychological dependence in some users, and may cause physical dependence in a few.

Those are the quotes I have collected after three weeks of research. I could have gone on and on. I realise that the House wants extra data rather than quotes from other researchers. However, I have always found that the only thing one can steal in life is ideas. When a person researches good material, it is worth taking those ideas on board to become better educated about the subject. The issue of growing cannabis in backyards has been talked about often around Australia. Legislation has been tried in South Australia to the detriment of that State. Other States have put away the legislation and said that they have done the research and it is not on. This State's Liberal Opposition stands to a man in its endeavour to convince the Labor Government that it is in error. We agree on many things throughout the year but I am passionately opposed to this legislation because, somewhere along the line, the Labor Government has made an error. It has been influenced somewhere. One story is that the Labor Party needs the votes of the minor parties. It says, "If we bow down to you and do what you want, that will help us get in at the next election." I tell people that this Labor Government would not stoop so low. However, something has influenced some of the key thinkers in this Government whom I look up to.

This legislation will be destructive to the future of all youth in this State. The Minister for Health can praise his Drug Summit recommendations for as long as he likes, but I believe he is wrong, as does the health industry and the clear-thinking members of the community, who comprise the majority of people in Western Australia. The Minister for Health cannot bluff his way out of this one. The community does not want to see its youth become

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addicted to cannabis. The legislation will cause an increase in violent home invasions, police corruption and crime rackets. It will cause the strong young decision makers in this community to be indecisive and to lack initiative.

As a former professional athlete, I know that self-discipline makes the difference between winning and losing. The ability to go through the pain barrier without flinching requires a trained mind. I am naturally concerned that by making cannabis very easy to experiment with, this Government will create a dependence on drugs to enable one to perform. I will not be a party to that. I am interested to hear what my colleague the member for Mandurah has to say on this legislation, and I will be interested to see which way he votes. As a primary school teacher and a promoter of youth education, which way will he go? Everyone in Mandurah is watching him and waiting to see what his decision will be.

The Government is sending a message to our youth that cannabis is okay. A small dose of cannabis can produce a feeling of wellbeing, a loss of inhibitions, a loss of concentration, and a tendency to talk and laugh more than usual - I have seen the Minister for Health do that a few times. It can cause impaired balance and coordination, increased appetite and increased heart rate. Speaking of increased appetite, it has just turned 12 noon, and about half a dozen government members are listening to this debate. There are usually about 28 in the Chamber when the vote is taken. They have all gone to lunch at 12 noon. There must be an increased appetite among them. Other effects are reddened eyes and a tunnel awareness. That applies only to minor doses. Larger doses can cause confusion, restlessness, detachment from reality, feelings of excitement and hallucinations. Loss of self-control is very scary. It is scary to think that some people must rely on things like cannabis to feel good. This Government will encourage that. It is shameful.

A letter to the editor of *The West Australian* sums up my sheer disgust for the Labor Government's move to make growing cannabis legal. The letter was sent in by Arthur and Jenny Crabbe of Kondinin, and is headed "Dope destroyed our suicidal son". I have had three parents come into my electorate office after their children had committed suicide as a result of the influence of drugs. The chemist shop is just down the road from us, and every morning I see people lining up for methadone. I see the same people drinking at the Cobblers Tavern on a Friday night. Most members will know the effects of mixing alcohol with drugs. These people, unfortunately, do not know any better. We are forever bailing them out, when they come into my office. It saddens me, because athletes are reared on self-discipline; to do the miles, take the chances and make decisions in a split second that could mean a win or a loss. I see these people's eyes and their movement. There is no sparkle or movement in their muscles. I cannot measure their brains, but I see their bodies deteriorating. After a while I do not see them in the pub on Friday night and I wonder where they are. That is my concern. Abraham Lincoln is purported to have said that character and courage cannot be built by taking away initiative and independence. Anzac Day is coming up. The things Australians believe they have that the rest of world does not are initiative and independence. That makes us cheeky and bold, a special nation in the world and winners.

The Leader of the Opposition tabled some bags to show the enormity of the problem, but I pulled out an extract of an article that says that the Victorian Police Association disclosed that one cannabis plant can yield five crops a year, at 500 grams a crop, totalling 2 500 grams. The Woodward royal commission disclosed that a three-month-old cannabis plant will produce almost 500 grams of harvesting leaf or a crop of 2 000 grams a year. It is amazing. As soon as I read that, it reminded me of a man I visit at Dawesville. He is on a 10-acre property and makes his own beer. He cannot get enough bottles. Every time I visit him, I must take as many old bottles as I have available, because he is making so much and he wants to give me half a dozen to take home. That is alcohol. He drinks most of it. Asked what he does at night, he said that he knocks off six bottles of beer, because he makes it for nothing. That example should help the Minister for Health to understand what some people are like. When something is being made for next to nothing, it is absorbed. When people start growing cannabis plants in the backyard - I certainly will not, but a heck of a lot of people will take advantage of this Bill - they will not be able to use the quantity they grow. Will they bury it? Of course not. They will give it away, and then the unscrupulous people we all know will start to sell it. This legislation will drag down the youth of this State. It is disgraceful, and will see the Government cast aside at the next election.

**MS K. HODSON-THOMAS** (Carine) [12.06 pm]: I will talk about some concerns I have about people under the influence of cannabis driving a vehicle, but first I want to put on record my view that this Bill sends mixed messages to young people, and will normalise the use of cannabis. I am certainly not naive in the view that many young people use cannabis. I am the mother of two sons; the eldest will turn 21 in about four weeks, and the other is 15. I am aware that my eldest son has tried cannabis. He will probably be particularly embarrassed that I should place that on record.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Does that make him a criminal?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No, it does not make him a criminal.

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Mr R.C. Kucera: Should it make him a criminal?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No, it should not make him a criminal. I have had long discussions with my son, particularly during my time as a member of the Select Committee on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981. The minister alluded to some comments that I made in a speech in this place. My son at that stage was very interested in some of the things we were looking at, particularly heroin, cannabis and other poly drugs. We talked about it at great length, largely because, as a responsible parent, I thought he needed all the information so that he could make some good choices in life. Young people are risk takers, and parents should provide them with information so that they take the right and healthy risks, like hang-gliding or parachute jumping. Those things provide very healthy adrenaline rushes for young people. My son said at that stage that he felt that if the Government were to go down the path of decriminalising marijuana, it would send a clear message to him and his peers that it was okay to smoke dope. Quite clearly, he did not believe that. I do not believe that young people should be given a criminal record. The expiation notice that the previous Government implemented was a way -

Mr R.C. Kucera: You did not implement it.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: We trialled it in a couple of places.

I return to my earlier comments about driving a vehicle while under the influence of cannabis. I intend to illustrate those concerns by quoting from a number of papers that clearly demonstrate why the Opposition is alarmed about the intention of this Government to decriminalise cannabis, and what that means to our communities. The Injury Control Council of Western Australia states in its position paper on road crash trauma that the cost of road trauma in Australia is estimated at more than \$6 billion a year. In Western Australia the annual cost of road crashes exceeds \$1 billion. The social costs of road crashes are harder to define. I use that paper to illustrate the concerns that the Opposition has with the legislation before us, particularly because there will be an increase in the use of cannabis and, therefore, a likely increase in the cost to the State of road trauma.

I refer to a paper written by Associate Professor Laurence Hartley. For the benefit of members, I take this opportunity to provide some background information on his credentials. He holds a doctoral degree in psychology from University College, University of London. He is a fellow of the Australian Psychological Society Ltd and is the author of more than 200 papers and reports on various matters, including road safety and transport projects. He has directed many consultancies on road safety to the Traffic Board, the Department of Transport, Main Roads, the federal Office of Road Safety, VicRoads, the National Road Transport Commission and legal practices. He teaches courses on changing the behaviour of drug and alcohol users and brings an understanding of behavioural changes in high-risk groups of road users. In Associate Professor Hartley's paper, which is a summary of the complete report titled "Roadside Drug Testing: A Review of Methods and Results", which is publicly available, he states -

Two drugs for which there is growing evidence that they increase crash risk are minor tranquilizers and cannabis . . . -

I repeat, "and cannabis". His introduction states -

There is now abundant evidence that the consumption of licit and illicit drugs is increasing world wide . . .

That should set the alarm bells ringing for all of us. He further states -

This trend poses a general safety concern and specifically a road safety concern since there is evidence that people are driving after consuming drugs which may impair driving abilities. The drugs of most concern are some of the prescription benzodiazepine minor tranquilizers and cannabis . . . Until recently cannabis was thought to have a relatively benign effect on driving. However, Swann (1999) has reanalysed some recent data and found that the crash culpability ratios of drivers with cannabis present are nearly comparable to those with alcohol present . . . Bearing these facts in mind it becomes increasingly important to have in place procedures to successfully apprehend drivers with certain drugs present.

The Associate Professor's key findings state -

Without a doubt drug consumption and drug driving is increasing.

As I said, that should set alarm bells ringing. Quite frankly, it is incumbent on this Government to implement roadside drug testing, given that it is bringing this legislation before Parliament today.

This Government's intention to decriminalise cannabis will lead to an increase in the number of people who drive under the influence of cannabis. It may also put people's lives at risk on our roads. This legislation fails to take into account the fact that cannabis impairs a person's driving ability. The impact of cannabis on road safety

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was detailed in a bulletin by the Western Australian Task Force on Drug Abuse, which found that cannabis was detected in 48 per cent of road fatalities between 1992 and 1995. That is just one per cent fewer than the number of fatalities in which alcohol was detected. If the Labor Government is intent on decriminalising the possession of an ounce or 30 grams of cannabis and the cultivation of two plants, at the very least the responsible minister - the Minister for Police and Emergency Services - should address the implications of this legislation for road safety.

As I demonstrated earlier in my address, it is clear that cannabis use impairs motor skills in driving. That is why mandatory drug testing has been implemented at workplaces in which heavy machinery is operated. Those workplaces have a zero tolerance policy. That clearly indicates to me that the Government should ensure that it provides the mechanisms to conduct roadside drug testing.

We all know the dangers of drink-driving. We have all seen the major public education campaigns against drink-driving. Those campaigns should continue. I congratulate the minister for her endeavours in that respect. Those campaigns are a constant reminder to all of us that we should not drink and drive because if we do, we will obviously get caught, and so we should. There are far too many road fatalities as a result of drink-driving. However, the legislation before us does nothing to provide a similar campaign to discourage young people from smoking cannabis and driving. To date, the minister has shown no regard for roadside drug testing of people who are suspected of driving under the influence of cannabis.

Earlier, I referred to the Western Australian Task Force on Drug Abuse bulletin that reported that cannabis had been detected in 48 per cent of road fatalities between 1992 and 1995. Of those 197 fatalities involving mood-altering substances, cannabis was detected in 95 cases. Of those 95 cases, 27 involved cannabis alone, 49 involved cannabis and alcohol, and 11 involved cannabis and other drugs.

Further, an article by Amanda Banks in *The West Australian* on 31 March 2003 referred to an Australian Institute of Criminology study, which monitored drug-driving by detainees at four lockups in Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. It was found that at the East Perth lockup, 58.3 per cent of those arrested for traffic offences tested positive for cannabis use. Of the 561 traffic offenders tested nationally, 71 per cent tested positively to at least one of the six drug classes and 55 per cent tested positive to cannabis. That illustrates the need for roadside drug testing. We should all be alarmed by these statistics. They illustrate that the Government is being totally irresponsible by not implementing the necessary roadside drug testing. It is interesting to note that an information leaflet issued by the South Australian police to individuals served with a cannabis expiation notice states -

Your ability to drive a motor vehicle may be impaired while you are affected by cannabis. Combining alcohol use with cannabis reduces driving ability even more.

That information leaflet also outlines the short-term and long-term effects of cannabis use. I take this opportunity to outline those. Although a number of other members have already done so, I feel it is important to place it on record in my address today. This leaflet states that the immediate and short-term effects of cannabis use vary from person to person, and include distorted perceptions; difficulties with concentration, problem solving and short-term memory; loss of coordination and slower reaction times; increased heart rate and changes in blood pressure; and a dry mouth and bloodshot eyes.

The leaflet refers to the long-term effects of cannabis use, which may contribute to the following health and psychological problems: greater risk of chronic bronchitis and other respiratory problems such as wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath and emphysema. Cannabis users have an increased risk of getting cancers of the lung, mouth, throat and tongue. They are at greater risk of developing psychotic symptoms; for example, schizophrenia or losing touch with reality, especially people who have a history of psychotic illness. Some people will lack energy and motivation. Cannabis use can cause reduced fertility in men and women and, when used during pregnancy, can cause low-weight babies and may contribute to a higher risk of birth defects. Cannabis dependants and people who use drugs regularly may have trouble controlling their use of drugs and may continue to use cannabis despite experiencing problems. They may experience withdrawal symptoms, sleep disturbance, anxiety or irritability. If they abruptly try to stop their cannabis use, they may find it very difficult to keep away from it.

I started off by stating that I had concerns about the use of cannabis and the need for roadside drug testing and this Government's lack of regard for implementing roadside testing. It is important that the minister implement it as soon as possible. I understand that the Western Australian Road Safety Council is looking at measures to combat drug-impaired driving in this State. As stated in *The West Australian* on 1 April in a news-in-brief article, a working group has been convened by the council to examine the extent of the problem. The group's recommendation, which will also canvass the adequacy of existing measures, and possible legislative changes to address drug-impaired driving, will be considered by the State Government. The Office of Road Safety's

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principal policy officer, Sue Hellyer, said that previous research indicated that drug impairment was involved in about 10 per cent of fatal accidents, which is a little different from some of the information that I previously provided. However, that report will be of great interest. It is incumbent upon this Government to implement that legislation, as well as the changes required, and to ensure that roadside drug testing is implemented immediately. I do have concerns that roadside testing is not being done and that the report coming down in July is too late. It should be happening now in tandem with this legislation. We should all be concerned about that.

I am sure that all of us have been impacted upon in some way as a result of the use of illicit drugs. A number of my constituents have come to me and spoken of problems they have experienced because young family members use illicit drugs, and what it means to their families, not least to the users themselves, who obviously use hard drugs such as heroin. As I said previously, I contributed in this House during the last term of government and served as a member of the Select Committee into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981, which certainly gave me an opportunity to understand how drugs impact on people's lives.

From a personal perspective, in my early twenties I travelled to Europe with a friend who became a heavy cannabis user. She ultimately became a heroin user. That changed her life in many ways. I have some personal experiences of that, as she was and still is a very close and dear friend of mine.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: It is interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition said today that when many of us may have been experimenting with cannabis 20 or 30 years ago, the tetrahydrocannabinol content in cannabis was not as high as it is now. That needs to be repeated in this place over and over again, because we are not comparing apples with apples. We are talking about cannabis grown today with much higher levels of THC, which has serious consequences for people's lives. I have already alluded to that in my address.

A Roy Morgan poll was conducted on Saturday, 26 January 2002. Although it is a little dated, it states -

**MORE AUSTRALIANS SAY 'MARIJUANA SHOULD REMAIN ILLEGAL'**

Despite anecdotal evidence suggesting that the number who use cannabis recreationally has increased, a clear majority of Australians (60 %) still believe marijuana should remain "illegal," according to the Morgan Poll.

By and large my community is sending me that very message; that cannabis should remain illegal. If the use of cannabis remains illegal, it does not send the wrong message to people that it is okay to smoke dope. We should not be encouraging the greater use of this illicit drug; in fact, we should be discouraging it at every opportunity. We can see the health consequences of alcohol and tobacco use. The State pays an enormous price as a result of the health problems associated with their use. We may now see a rise in the health consequences and costs of the increased use of cannabis.

An article in *The West Australian* of Wednesday, 23 January 2002 refers to the South Australian Labor Government's experience of its failed marijuana laws. The article reads -

In 1987, the Labor government of John Bannon introduced a daring policy that decriminalised personal marijuana use. Instead of being jailed, personal users were fined for growing up to 10 plants.

Adelaide flourished as the marijuana capital until 18 months ago when the Liberal Government cut the plant limit from 10 to three. In November it was cut to one . . .

"The 1987 model failed and we were seeing drug networks set up," Police Minister Robert Brokenshire said . . .

Home invasions - many violent - have been a particularly nasty consequence of home crops. But the nature of cannabis also has changed. Cultivation methods improved so much that more potent varieties have emerged.

"The new varieties of cannabis with very potent THC component cause serious health issues," . . .

I would also like to refer to a media statement which I understand is hot off the press and which is referred to in the *Herald Sun*. The article, which is by Jessica Lawrence and is dated 6 April 2003, is headed "Teenagers addicted to pot" and reads -

ANTI-drug campaigners say that new research, showing that one in three teenagers who smokes cannabis weekly becomes hooked by the early 20s, proves that it should not be treated as a "soft" drug.

The shocking study found teens who used cannabis every week were at high risk of addiction, with males more likely to develop a long-term habit.

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Experts say use of the drug in Australia is rising, with almost two-thirds of 21-year-olds claiming to have tried it.

I use that to illustrate yet again that we are talking about young people. They are fairly inexperienced drivers, so we need to implement some education programs to discourage people from driving under the influence of cannabis. Although there is some provision in the legislation for doing that, I do not think it is enough. There is certainly no regard for the need to implement roadside drug testing. I repeat that it is incumbent on this Government to ensure that it does that in tandem with this legislation. If it is the Government's intention to decriminalise the use of marijuana and ensure that young people go without a record if they are caught smoking marijuana -

Mr R.C. Kucera: You are wrong.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The Minister for Health can make his comments in his time. I have limited time. I took some earlier interjections, but I do not intend to take any during my concluding remarks. It is incumbent on this Government to bring before this House legislation that ensures that roadside drug testing is carried out. If the use of cannabis is to rise, it is likely that the number of accidents and fatalities on our roads will also rise. Evidence has shown that cannabis has been in the blood of people who have been killed on our roads. We need to address this issue, particularly for young people, who make up a large statistic of the fatalities on our roads. That is of great concern to members on this side of the House, and it is certainly of great concern to me. It would be of great concern to anybody. I commented earlier about some evidence of Associate Professor Laurence Hartley, which indicates to me that the research has been done.

The Office of Road Safety is examining this issue and will bring down its findings in July. That is clearly not soon enough. It needs to happen now. I will repeat again and again that this Government should bring in legislation to be debated in conjunction with the Cannabis Control Bill 2003 to ensure the testing of anyone thought to be driving under the influence of cannabis. I understand that that would involve some costs, but the long-term cost of road trauma will ultimately be far greater. As I said, this State annually spends \$1 billion of taxpayers' funds on trying to prevent road crashes and on the trauma associated with road crashes. That is an enormous amount. We should be running the same sorts of campaigns against cannabis use as have been run with drink-driving campaigns. Drivers should be tested to ensure that they do not drive under the influence of cannabis. Somebody recently told me that people who drive under the influence of cannabis have a tendency to drive slowly. That could probably be said of people who drive under the influence of alcohol; that they get behind the wheel aware that their driving ability is impaired by alcohol, and so choose not to speed but to obey all the road rules. That could be said about anything. The bottom line is that we need to implement measures to ensure that roadside drug testing is conducted so that people do not drive under the influence of cannabis. It is incumbent upon this Government to introduce legislation to implement roadside drug testing. I am disappointed that the responsible minister is not doing that, and that the Office of Road Safety is reviewing and examining this issue and will report by July. That should happen now. Quite frankly, it is not soon enough.

**MR B.K. MASTERS** (Vasse) [12.33 pm]: I rise to express my strong opposition to the Cannabis Control Bill 2003. My opposition to this Bill can be summarised by my concern that, once enacted, this Bill will send not just mixed messages to young people, as others on this side of the House have said, but also will provide positive reinforcement to young people that it is okay not just to experiment with marijuana but also to have it in one's possession, to smoke it regularly and to grow one or two plants at home. That message is totally and absolutely unacceptable. When one considers the pressures on the young people of today - I do not mean the pressures of education or violent videos -

Mr R.N. Sweetman: Bad government!

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Bad government might apply to both sides of the fence. I mean the pressures on young people in terms of their vision for their future lives. The message that they are getting from more and more sections of the community is that life is actually not all that wonderful. They are getting the message that life is pretty difficult, that one must, for example, pass all one's exams, go to a tertiary institution or get a job straightaway, have a girlfriend or boyfriend, as appropriate, at a young age so that they are part of the teen scene, and so on. Members may have been able to come to grips with those messages in a simpler day and age when we were teenagers. The message today has been compounded by the media, which has created unacceptable images of, among other things, what young people should be doing and what their physical appearance should be. However, there is no big picture. No vision is provided to allow young people to say that this is a wonderful world in which we live, that, as people far more famous than I am have said, life is beautiful, and that it is worth putting up with the difficulties in life because the benefits and enjoyable parts are well worth it.

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I wish to read from a newspaper article that appeared in *The West Australian* of 30 November last year, headed "Drug policy wrong: former addict". With your forbearance, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr A.P. O'Gorman), I will read a few paragraphs. The sting is in the tail. The important part of this article is right at the end. It reads -

CHARLES SLACK was at the heart of the psychedelic revolution which hit America, then the world, in the 1960s.

As a hard-drinking, assistant professor of psychology at Harvard University, Boston, he tried every hallucinogenic "trip" including LSD, magic mushrooms, opiates and cannabis.

The article continues -

Drugs ruined his career. In March 1976, he joined an abstinence program, then migrated at age 47 to Australia to start a new life, and become a Christian.

Further down it states -

But he worries about plans to ease WA's drug laws so that people found with up to 30g of cannabis or two cannabis plants will get only infringement notices, and no criminal record.

"If you moderate the laws, you will have more kids smoking dope because a certain number would not have been smoking before," he said.

"There is the crime people commit to be able to buy the drug, and the crime committed after using it . . . cannabis causes weird crime.

"But nobody quits drugs because of the laws. They quit because they find hope, through the positive example of someone showing them it was possible."

He found alcohol and cannabis the hardest to quit. "The drug I had the least respect for, the one that was currently killing me the least, was the hardest to get off," he said. "But until I did, I kept relapsing on to all the other drugs."

He said new, softer drug laws must be accompanied by a Quit-type campaign on the many health risks of cannabis use and, very importantly, the benefits of having a clean brain.

The article continues -

"So I am about promoting abstinence, which is different to simply prohibiting drug use, but drug use must be replaced by another purpose in life and a belief in some power greater than yourself." He said the drug debate was polarised between those wanting prohibition and those favouring harm reduction. But the answer lay with a third group, recovered addicts, to whom nobody was listening.

"I am a recovered addict," he said. "I defy anybody to say I am not a solution to the problem."

Unfortunately, those advocating harm reduction and more relaxed laws often did not believe total abstinence was a real option.

"They think it's a religious thing and an unattainable objective," he said. "But drug users who become totally abstinent these days don't do it for religious reasons. For them, as for me, it just becomes a matter of getting clean or dying - or continuing to live in hell."

I am pleased to have read those words of former Professor Charles Slack, who is now 73 years old, because they encapsulate my concerns about many young people not just in Western Australia or Australia, but in many western societies. They are taking their lives at a rate that is increasing day by day. In the south west of Western Australia, for example - I believe an article in the *South Western Times* some months ago pointed this out - there were 17 suicides, mainly young men, all under the age of about 25 to 30. I knew at least one of those people. Whether marijuana was related to those 17 suicides I cannot say because the statistical work has not been done to demonstrate it one way or the other.

Mr A.J. Dean: On that point of suicide, you would be interested to know that I have personally instituted a forum next week to be chaired by the Bishop of Bunbury, David McCall, at which expert witnesses will appear over the next six to 12 months to see what we can do about youth suicide in the south west. If you are free on Tuesday, you are welcome to come along.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I appreciate the offer but Parliament will be sitting.

Mr A.J. Dean: I will give you a pair.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: It is easier for the member to get a pair than it is for a member of the Opposition. I must point out that I was the member of Parliament who raised the issue of youth suicide. It started off as a small article in the *Busselton-Margaret Times*. The member's good friend Joe Spagnolo took the article and turned it into something much bigger. I am pleased to say that he has raised it to the profile it deserves. I am not trying to



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belittle the good work the member, the Government and the community need to do on the issue of youth suicide but, even though I am unaware of the role marijuana may have played in any or all of the 17 suicides, the fact remains that if a person takes his own life, it means, in almost every instance, that he or she has given up on the will to live. Such a person sees no reason to continue to live. By weakening the marijuana laws - it is one of several terms I could apply - the Government is sending the message to young people that it is okay for young people to experiment with drugs because the Government has nothing better for them to do. This Government, like any Government, should be trying to provide a clear vision to all Western Australians of the good citizens they are capable of being, and should be, in this State. I have no doubt that the types of comments I have just quoted from Charles Slack pertain to many young people, young cannabis users in particular; that is, they are people who do not see much joy or benefit in life in general and who resort to drugs in order to ease what they perceive to be some pain in their lives. It has an avalanche effect. It is my view that a small proportion of people, because of their genetic disposition - putting aside the environment in which they are brought up - will be predisposed to becoming addicted to either alcohol, nicotine, marijuana or heroin - you name it. Even supposedly innocuous drugs like caffeine can be addictive.

The reality is that we are sending out a broad message that drugs are okay, especially marijuana. We are confusing the minds of young people who should be getting a completely different and very positive message from this Parliament, the Government and every member who is prepared to do his or her job properly. It is worth repeating some of the earlier comments that, for various reasons, some people in our society are predisposed to addiction, mental illness or other problems as a result of the use of marijuana.

I am speaking today because the member for Darling Range, who is the Opposition's education spokesman, is unfortunately paired. I understand that he wanted to say a number of things about the education aspects of the Cannabis Control Bill. Under the cannabis infringement notice system to be put in place, an offender who is caught with less than 30 grams of marijuana or two or fewer plants can pay a fine or elect to go to a cannabis education session. I am informed that such sessions aim to educate offenders about three things: first, the adverse health and social consequences of marijuana usage; secondly, the options available for treatment; and, thirdly, they give a better understanding of cannabis laws. I hope Mr Acting Speaker will forgive my cynicism if I express grave doubts about the effectiveness of a cannabis education system unless it is quite significantly enhanced and improved. Back in my university days a friend of mine, who is now an engineer, was stopped by the police while driving over the old Fremantle traffic bridge. I am told he was as drunk as a skunk - if the House will excuse the expression. He sobered up enough to explain to the police officer why his lights were not on. The police officer told him he had committed an offence by driving at night without lights. He was told that if he attended a traffic education session in East Perth, an offence would not be recorded against his name. My acquaintance duly attended the education session, once again, drunk as a skunk. He went into the lecture hall, waited until the lights were turned out, opened a window, climbed out and went home. That was some 30 years ago so I assume things have improved significantly since then. Nonetheless, I tell the story to highlight the fact that when a person is young and impressionable and does not receive a strong enough message from those in our society who should be advising on the best way to behave and what community standards are expected, it is very easy to attend something like a cannabis education session in body but to be floating somewhere else in spirit or to be mentally miles away. We must be aware that a cannabis education session by itself could be relatively ineffective.

It is crucial that young people are made aware of the risks of cannabis use and the details of the scheme we are debating today, as outlined in the Cannabis Control Bill. The public education campaign planned by the Government can hardly be described as comprehensive. The ministerial working party recommended that an intensive campaign of four weeks would cost about \$292 000. Of that amount, only \$20 000 would be likely to be allocated to self-help materials for stopping or reducing cannabis use. That amount of money, whether it is \$292 000 or \$20 000, stands in stark contrast to the amount of money provided to the Quit campaign, which amounted to \$2.83 million last year or the year before. As a former smoker I totally support the Quit campaign. To suggest that cannabis is less harmful or less of a concern than tobacco is folly. To suggest that \$292 000 for an education campaign on cannabis is acceptable when compared with \$2.83 million for the Quit campaign is sheer stupidity. It is also irresponsible on the part of the Government.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 6650.]