

COMPULSORY DRIVING ASSESSMENTS — REFORM

822. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Transport:

I understand that the government has removed compulsory practical driving assessments for drivers aged 85 years and older who renew their licence. Can the minister please detail to the house how these changes will benefit seniors?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

Thank you very much, member for Swan Hills. I was doing some sums today and, unfortunately for the member, it will be at least 21 years before he benefits from any of these changes. My suspicion is that he will still be here, given the quality of the job that he is doing and what he is delivering for his constituents. I always find it interesting that when the member for Swan Hills stands up to speak in the chamber, members opposite make comments about his age—he is, after all, a very young 64-year-old.

In relation to the question raised by the member, I noted with some interest today the public commentary from a man by the name of Bob Kucera who was, in his capacity as president of the Western Australian Council on the Aging, supporting the reforms we have announced. It is appropriate to point out to the house that he was born in 1944—he is five years older than the member for Swan Hills. The Labor Party was interested in Bob Kucera because back in 2008, he was considered too old to run for the seat and I remember it had Karen Brown —

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Entertaining or not as the Treasurer may be, truthful or not as the Treasurer may be, his comments are not pertinent to the question asked.

The SPEAKER: Treasurer, come back to the question.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Of course, all that is old is new again, and he was recycled in 2013 to be dispatched by you, Mr Speaker, to the cover boundaries.

A very important reform announcement was made today about seniors' driving licences in Western Australia. This reform process started in 2012. We have been approaching it in a careful and considered manner and delivering some very positive outcomes for seniors who hold licences. As members of the house may recall, before 2012, a person aged 75 years or 78 years was required to get a medical. From 80 to 84 years of age a person was required to get their licence renewed every year and have a medical done. From the age of 85 years onwards a person was required to do a practical driving assessment as well as have a medical done. In 2012 we removed the medical requirements at the ages of 75 and 78 and from recollection, that affected about 26 000 people who held licences.

The announcement today, which has been received very warmly by the seniors associations in WA and, I am sure, by individual seniors, is that from the middle of December a person will no longer have to sit a practical driving test every year from the age of 85 years—all a person has to do is get a medical. This does not mean a person will not sit a practical driving test. If, during the course of conducting the medical, the general practitioner forms the view that the person should have a driving test, he will be referred for one, and individuals can still voluntarily do the driving test. This is important reform. It does not affect a lot of people but when we talk to seniors and seniors groups, we find that to try to organise a practical driving assessment has a big impact on their life. About 11 500 seniors in WA over the age of 85 years hold licences.

We have made this decision for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the advice I have received is that from a road safety point of view, people over the age of 85 are no more a danger on the roads than anybody else; in fact, they are responsible for around one per cent of serious and significant accidents in this state. I will quickly share with the house a quote from a person by the name of Sjaanie Koppel, who is a senior researcher with the Monash University Accident Research Centre in Melbourne. Monash has done a five-year study into the driving behaviour of seniors. In a transcript of an interview on 720 ABC radio, she said —

... certainly the evidence is not there for age-based testing. Our research here has showed that, at least here in Victoria which has no age-based testing, our state, you know, performs significantly better in quite a few areas, compared to those states that do have age-based testing. So it's not getting the right people to stop driving.

I am confident that this will have no adverse road safety impact. I know it will have a significant positive impact on the lives of people who previously had to get practical driving assessments from age 85. Importantly, it brings WA into line with most other Australian states, with the exception of New South Wales. I appreciate the member

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Mr Frank Alban; Mr Troy Buswell; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Speaker

for Swan Hills' interest in this area. I also understand that it is a long way off for him, but it is important for a range of people in WA.