

JUVENILE OFFENDERS, STATEMENT BY MEMBER FOR NEDLANDS

637. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Minister for Justice:

I refer the minister to the claims made today by the member for Nedlands about the release of juvenile offenders. Will the minister advise the House on this issue?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:

I thank the member for Ballajura for the question. I can certainly advise the House on this issue.

Today's actions by the member for Nedlands demonstrate once again how the Opposition is attempting to con the people of Western Australia. Yesterday we heard her scurrilous claims about regional prisons in Western Australia. The Inspector of Custodial Services, whom members opposite quite often quote -

Ms S.E. Walker: Did you lean on him?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Did I lean on him? The independent Inspector of Custodial Services released a statement about the claims made by the member for Nedlands. It reads -

The Office of the Minister for Justice, the Hon. Michelle Roberts, contacted me today with regard to the Media Release by the Opposition spokesperson on Justice, Ms Sue Walker. It was my view that Ms Walker's comments do not accurately represent the problems that exist in such prisons as Broome, Roebourne and Eastern Goldfields. There are deficiencies in these prisons but they are not "hell holes", as Ms Walker suggested, nor do I consider that they are on the verge of riot. I made these views known to the Minister's Office.

It goes on to state -

The best performing Australian State prison system is that of Victoria. In broad terms, the Western Australian system is not far behind. This is a good achievement when it is considered that a system such as Victoria's poses fewer management problems, in that the geographical spread of the State is so much less making integration of services simpler and per capita fixed costs lower, and that the prisoner mix is different and the imprisonment rate lower.

That was yesterday. Today the member for Nedlands has again tried to mislead people. The member tried to claim today that somehow, as Minister for Justice, I released juvenile offenders. That is not true. The Supervised Release Review Board, an independent board that reports directly to the Parliament, makes those decisions completely free from any government influence. The member also claimed that it was our Government that somehow made it possible for these offenders to be released early. Again that is not true. The offenders were released under the Young Offenders Act of 1994 - legislation that was put in place by a Liberal Government. That is what allowed the release of these offenders. The member for Nedlands also claimed that somehow our Government watered down the release provisions to enable these offenders to be released. Again that is not true. The fact is that there have been no increases in the number of either adults or juveniles being released on parole or given early release by our Government. In fact, we have toughened the release conditions for adult offenders.

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The other big con by the member for Nedlands is the claim that the coalition's policy will address all these problems and that its policy to build another court will somehow fix the problem. That is a complete con. Both juveniles and adults are subject to the same statutory penalties under the Criminal Code. Simply building another bureaucratic court will not make any difference whatsoever. People want to know how an incident such as that which has been described today can be prevented in the future.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Have members finished their yelling match?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: This Parliament has a responsibility to ensure that laws are in place that do not allow serious juvenile offenders to be released into the community.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Members opposite can run but they cannot hide. I introduced legislation into this House to deal with juveniles such as these and they opposed it. I introduced legislation that would give the review board the power to detain people such as these two young rapists for longer and to ensure that they did programs.

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The Leader of the Opposition is not telling the truth. He should be embarrassed, because he is again misleading the House. He said that I have the power and I did not do anything. He should read the legislation. He knows that the power does not exist for me to intervene, and I cannot intervene because of the legislation the Liberal Government put in place.

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Members opposite do not want to hear the last part, but the last part is the most important part. The last part is about putting in place good legislation to allow intensive supervision orders for juveniles and to allow us to tag juveniles when they go back into the community. Members of the Opposition opposed it. The Leader of the Opposition does not want these juveniles to be monitored in the community; he wants them to be released. That is what his legislation allowed. Our legislation would have given the review board the power to detain them for longer and to insist that they do programs and have further psychiatric treatment. It would have strengthened the ability of the review board to enforce conditions of release if and when they were eventually released, which could have included curfews and monitoring, but members opposite opposed it.