

Deputy Speaker; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Mr Terry Waldron; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Dr Janet Woollard; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr John Quigley

CRIME, GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH

Matter of Public Interest

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D.J. Guise): Today I received a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion -

This House condemns the Gallop Government for its soft on crime approach, which has compromised the safety and security of Western Australians.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The matter shall proceed on the usual basis.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [3.08 pm]: I move the motion.

A host of factors impact upon crime in our community and a few facts are undeniable. The first is that, unfortunately, Western Australia, Perth in particular, enjoys the reputation of being the burglary capital of Australia. That is a fact and, although the Government might claim credit for a recent reduction in burglary rates, Western Australia retains that standing.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It is more than what you could do in eight years.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The minister may well complain, but it is a pity her Government has not achieved something.

I refer first to the broad picture. Here is a Government whose main policy on policing has been the Royal Commission Into Whether There Has Been Any Corrupt or Criminal Conduct by Western Australian Police Officers. If that is the focus of a Premier and a Minister for Police, little wonder that police morale is low and that some 200 police officers a year are leaving the Police Service. The focus has been on spending \$28 million on a royal commission as a result of which two charges have been laid.

I refer now to drugs. We all understand that drugs are a serious issue in our community and have a devastating impact. I heard a tearful mother on radio this morning describe how her young daughter had become involved in taking drugs. This Government has decriminalised not only the possession of cannabis but also the cultivation of marijuana. It sends the message that this Government is soft on crime.

The Government has passed legislation to remove all jail sentences of less than six months. Many people who commit serious offences are jailed for periods of less than six months, probably wrongly because they are serious offenders. I do not think the community knows what this Government stands for in the area of policing. While one thing is being said, the reality for police officers and the public is very much different.

This Government has consistently denied claims made by both the Opposition and the Western Australian Police Union that it has not met its commitments to policing. I will address some of the facts relating to that. I remind people that in the Government's first budget in 2001-02 the police budget was cut by \$10 million, or five per cent. That is how the Government started its term. What a message to send to the crooks and criminals! This week we read in *The West Australian* that with the release of the forthcoming budget the Government will announce that 75 additional police officers will be recruited. That sounds good but what does it mean under this Government? We in this Chamber can all remember that in the lead-up to the last election, the then Leader of the Opposition, and now Premier, made the commitment that he would boost police numbers by 250 over four years and that they would be deployed throughout the State. I, similar to most other Western Australians, believed that that was a commitment to increase the number of police officers by 250. Increasingly, it seems that it was a commitment to replace police officers as they leave.

What is the record? In the two-and-a-half-year period between 30 June 2001, which was the start of the first full financial year of this Government's term, and the latest figures that we have available as at 29 February 2004, Labor has gone backwards. There were 35 fewer sworn officers in February this year than in June 2001. The figure has gone backwards by 35. It is little wonder that the community is cynical about a commitment to provide 250 extra police officers. Indeed, if Labor is to meet its commitment to provide 250 extra police officers, it must make up the 35 it is already down, replace the expected 200 who will leave the Police Service this year, find the 250, and then, as we are meant to believe, find a further 75. What is the commitment? Is it to provide 250 police officers or 325? How will the Government achieve that when it is 35 behind as of February this year? It has gone backwards.

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The Western Australian Police Union has made a claim for 500 additional police officers. It has little chance of getting anywhere near the number of officers that it considers are needed. Indeed, at a more micro level of what is happening on the ground, an additional 75 police officers would not even make up the current shortfall in the 11 out of 14 understaffed police districts.

The Government is also making commitments in the upcoming budget about opening 24-hour stations in metropolitan police districts. Indeed, should anyone forget, at the last election Labor said that it would ensure that all police stations are staffed to their authorised strengths. Eleven of 14 districts are below authorised strength. What about the police stations? Labor plans to open six 24-hour police stations. The public does not see that, even in the Minister for Police's electorate of Midland. As of April, both Midland and Kwinana Police Stations, which had been 24-hour stations -

Mrs M.H. Roberts: No, they were not.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The minister laughs. In the minister's electorate, Midland station operates for about eight hours a day. The minister found herself in the ludicrous situation of telling people to knock on the door or press the button. People did that and no-one was home. That shows how little the Minister for Police knows about a major police station in her electorate. A 24-hour-a-day station is now an eight-hour-a-day station. There is a lot of crime in the Palmyra area. The Palmyra station has gone from a 24-hour-a-day station to an eight-hour-a-day station. Indeed, the whole east metropolitan police district, which covers more than 2 000 square kilometres, does not have a single 24-hour station. Yet the minister has the gall to announce, in a pre-election environment, that there will be 24-hour stations.

In Labor's first budget, it cut capital works on specific police stations, complexes and outposts by nearly 50 per cent. That was a specific cut to that area. There was more capital works in other areas, but that was a cut in capital works on police stations. The Government is now talking about having more civilians in the force. Labor said that it would work to identify more areas in which civilian staff could be used for non-police duties. What has happened? Labor introduced a \$1.6 million, four-year redundancy program for unsworn staff. It had a policy to have more work done by civilians; then it introduced a redundancy program to take civilians out of the Police Service. Talk about a Government not knowing what it is doing! It has very little idea.

The public expects police stations to be open. It expects to see police officers in the community, on the roads and on the beat, and it expects response times to be shortened. When members of the public call the police in a state of stress, anxiety or fear to report an incident, they expect a response. What did Labor say at the last election about response times? It said that it would set clear targets for all police response times and ensure proper resources were provided to help the police meet those targets. What has been the record? Half of all priority 1 calls in the metropolitan area were not responded to in the targeted time in 2002-03. Half of the priority 1 calls - the most serious situations - did not meet the targeted response times in 2002-03. That is hardly a record of achievement. More than a third of priority 2 calls in the metropolitan area were not responded to in the targeted times in 2002-03. Metropolitan police took up to 40 minutes to attend priority 3 calls.

The Western Australian Police Union commented quite famously a couple of weeks ago that people can expect a pizza to be delivered quicker than they can expect a police officer to respond to a call. What an indictment it is of the minister, the Premier and the Police Service under this Administration for the head of the Police Union, a person who stands as a champion for police officers in this State, to say that people have more chance of getting a pizza delivered than a police officer coming to their door. Indeed, in this morning's newspaper was the story of an 80-year-old woman who rang the police seven times before being able to speak to a police officer. An 80-year-old woman in our community had to make seven phone calls before she could even get a police officer on the end of the phone, and it took more than 10 hours for the police to go to her in response to a burglary. She had to make seven calls and wait 10 hours for the police to arrive; yet the minister reckons she is doing a good job in the police portfolio. That is an absolute disgrace. If we do not have a Government and a Police Service that are willing to provide a service, comfort and security to elderly citizens, the Minister for Police and the Premier should be absolutely ashamed. It goes on and on.

We hear all the rhetoric, but the community sees the opposite. I spent most of yesterday in the Minister for Police's electorate. Person after person in Midland told me about the lack of police presence, police powers and enforcement of and commitment to policing in the police minister's electorate of Midland. Person after person, in meeting after meeting, said that in that area there was a lack of effective policing, and they were very conscious that the police minister was their local member. That is true throughout the State. I come back to the fundamental point: if the Government does not support the police with funding, numbers and legislation and by taking a tough-on-crime approach, the community will see policing standards suffer. Tragically, under this Government, despite the rhetoric and talk of 250 extra police officers and the gall of the Government to say that there will be another 75 officers when it is running behind on the initial commitment, the community is seeing

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the reality; that is, a lack of access to police, to police stations and to police on the beat and on the roads. As long as that attitude of the minister and the Premier continues, this State will continue to be the burglary and crime capital of Australia.

MR D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN (Mitchell - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.17 pm]: We have had a number of debates in this Chamber that concern matters of extreme importance to people who live in country Western Australia. We have seen time and again how the current Labor Government has quite deliberately ignored the needs of our regional communities in so many different areas. We have had debates on the fact that the Labor Party has reduced road funding and is ignoring the health needs of country people. In question time today, we talked about the Moora District Hospital. The work on that hospital is happening now only as a result of extensive community opposition to the Government's previous decision and the support that the community received from members of Parliament opposite to the Labor Party.

There have been other problems in the country, such as the dramatic decline in the quality of infrastructure for electricity supplies. The Labor Party has even tried to take away members of Parliament from the country. However, I believe most people in country areas will agree that there is one area in particular in which this Labor Government has been utterly deficient; that is, in good law enforcement in country areas. It does not matter whether it is in Geraldton, where people raise the issue of crime, and juvenile crime in particular, or whether it is in the minister's electorate, where we have been this week talking to community representatives who have pleaded with us to please do something about the juvenile crime situation and to please tackle the law-and-order problems in that area because the Labor Party is not doing so. Surprise, surprise, in Albany, for example, a couple of years ago the Labor member even voted against building a new police station, but people there have a genuine concern about the problem. Most people would agree that if that problem is to be tackled head on, we need the police on the street, on the beat, to deal with it. The Labor Party has previously acknowledged this in its own policy documents. I do not think any member of this Chamber would disagree that if we are to tackle crime at the grassroots level, we need the coppers on the beat to do the job. Let us look at what the Labor Party promised in this one simple but important area of crime control. I refer members to the Labor Party's pre-election policy on policing, which stated in part -

... Labor will ...

- ensure that all police stations are staffed to their authorised strengths ...

That is a very simple, concise and unqualified commitment. I will now refer to country areas to see whether Labor has lived up to that commitment. In the north eastern region, according to the latest figures provided by this Government, the Kimberley police district is not staffed to authorised staffing levels. The Pilbara district office is also not staffed to authorised levels. The same applies in the goldfields-Esperance district office and the mid west-Gascoyne office. In other words, nowhere in the north eastern region is a single police district staffed to its authorised capacity. They do not have the police they need to get out and do the job. In the great southern region, based around Albany, the figures provided by the Government indicate that the Police Service is below authorised strength. In the south west region the Police Service is also below authorised strength, as it is in the Peel district and throughout the wheatbelt. In the whole of the southern region not one single police district is operating at its authorised strength, according to the figures provided to us by the Government.

I will now refer to one very specific promise made by the Labor Party during the last election campaign to do with providing additional police in country areas. It concerned a commitment by the Labor Party to set up a flying squad dedicated to servicing the needs of country Western Australia. The Labor Party's policy states -

It is essential that the police are able to respond to crime flashpoints and areas of need without undermining existing capacities.

It continues -

To address this problem, Labor will:

- **establish five new police Flying Squads over the next four years, as a strong and proactive policing force to complement the existing area commands.**

It continues -

The squads will saturate crime hot spots and target emerging crime and anti-social problems.

There will be five of these new flying squads and one will be based in the country. Guess what? The Government has not done that. When the Government announced that a flying squad would be located in Bunbury, it was totally deficient. Instead of having 23 officers, including a commissioned officer, two sergeants or senior sergeants and 20 constables, only five officers were allocated to that flying squad, one of whom was taken away from existing duties elsewhere in that police district. Only four new positions were allocated to that

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flying squad. The Labor Party was 19 officers short of its commitment to country Western Australia. I do not say this flippantly, but the Government is saying that it has a police flying squad in country Western Australia that is supposed to, according to the Labor Party's policy statement, saturate crime hot spots, and it has provided five officers to do that. If the flying squad was sent to Geraldton to deal with a riot, I dread to think what would happen if it also had to deal with an influx of bikies in the south west, or if it had to target a burglary outbreak in Albany, when it has five officers to deal with those situations. It is 19 officers short! In every single police district in country WA, the Government is short of its very firm commitment to ensure that the police districts and police stations have authorised numbers. Not only that, but the Government is 19 officers short of its commitment to establish a flying squad for country WA.

The bottom line is that some members of Parliament are not standing up for their local communities. In Geraldton there would not be an issue more deeply felt by the community than the need to do away with crime and the need to tackle juvenile vandalism and other crimes that really do impact on the local people. However, the local Labor member is not standing up for people in that community. The same situation exists in Albany, where the local member has not stood up for his community and insisted that this Government - his own Government - meet that commitment. The same situation applies in Bunbury, where the local member is not prepared to stand up for his local community.

Mr R.C. Kucera: You don't know what you are talking about.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I will take that interjection and put on the record that under the previous Government the number of police in the Bunbury district office was doubled. The member should know that fact.

According to the latest government statistics provided, the current situation is that not one single country district is operating at its authorised level. Once again the Government has let down country Western Australia and broken yet another election promise.

MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin) [3.26 pm]: The National Party supports this motion. The guarantee of a reasonable level of personal safety and security is a major concern for people living in country Western Australia. Fortunately, by world standards we live in a relatively safe society, but increasing crime in country communities is very disturbing. Crime in some areas of country WA has increased quite markedly, with some of the highest crime rates for many years now being recorded. However, the Labor Government has categorically failed to address the law and order needs of country communities. In country WA at the moment there are a large number of vacant positions at country police stations. On last advice there were approximately 58 vacancies. The Government has not made any inroads to fill these positions. In fact, the number of vacant positions has risen from about 36 in July 2003 to more than 50 in April 2004. Country postings have become an unattractive proposition for many police officers, mainly due to safety issues associated with single-police stations, poor living and working conditions, and inadequate incentives. This is apparent in my own region. As indicated by the high number of police vacancies in country WA, Labor has done little to resolve these issues.

The member for Cottesloe referred to police numbers and said that the Government promised that when it came to power it would appoint an additional 250 police officers. My understanding was that that meant an extra 250 police officers above the attrition rate. I thought it related to replacements, but, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the number is down by 35. The State Government really needs to get serious about boosting the police presence in all country communities to ensure that people living in country Western Australia can feel safe. We have always prided ourselves on safety in our communities. It is amazing that in a small community like Darkan there is not even a police officer, let alone a police station. People in that community get serviced from Williams, but that is quite a distance away. The Government should look at that issue. The shire would be very keen to assist with housing and facilities to have an officer located there.

National Party members recently toured police stations around country WA, and found that many of our police stations are in poor condition. Fewer than 25 per cent of prison cells in police stations in Western Australia comply with the custodial standards established after the black deaths in custody royal commission over 10 years ago. Many police premises fail to meet provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984. These poor working conditions are often mirrored in police officer living conditions in country communities, which acts as a deterrent to bringing police officers into areas where they are needed. Our inspections revealed that the senior sergeant at the busy five-man Williams Police Station on Albany Highway operates out of the storeroom because of a lack of space. I hope something will be done about that matter in the future. I understand it is being looked at. I encourage the minister to ensure that the situation is corrected. National Party members inspected many police stations, such as those at Williams, Narrogin, Wagin and Jurien Bay. I know a similar situation can be found in Esperance. People cannot be left in cells at these police stations because those cells do not meet standards; therefore, officers must watch prisoners in those cells all the time, and prisoners must be transferred overnight. Two officers in a three or four-officer police station must spend three or four hours transferring

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prisoners, during which time they are not performing their other duties. The minister has offered another \$1 million for upgrade purposes. That funding has been provided for electrical upgrades and fencing, not for the core work of upgrading the cells. That funding is needed. Also, the standard of police housing detracts from attracting police officers to country areas. This must improve.

I refer now to a lack of funding for some crime strategies, such as Safer WA. Taking away Safer WA is having a big effect in country WA. The network was not perfect, but it was working better in most country areas than was the case in the city. It was a terrific network that delivered real results in our country communities. For instance, my old home town of Kojonup has just formed a Safer Kojonup committee that it will keep running.

Time beats me. I ask the Labor Government to provide for the upgrade of police stations and cells, and to provide a modern and safe working environment for police officers. The Government must provide improved housing for police families, and incentives for police officers so that the 50-plus officer positions vacant in country WA can be filled. Crime is an issue in country WA, and the Government must take full responsibility and start to do more to rectify the situation.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland - Minister for Police and Emergency Services) [3.33 pm]: An interesting motion has been moved by the Opposition. At the outset, I thank members opposite for bringing the topic forward for debate. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than putting on the record the efforts our Government has made in dealing with law and order in this State. I refer in that regard to not only increases in police numbers and the police budget, but also work in the area of justice and improvements to sentencing and crime issues. I will touch on these matters. The motion refers to the Government's approach to crime, but little attention has been given to those matters in this debate. Comments were mostly focused on police numbers, authorised strengths and so forth. Little focus was given to our approach to crime. I will touch on both areas.

The principal argument from the Leader of the Opposition was that the Government has not delivered sufficient police officers to meet the target of an extra 250 officers. He stated that the Government has not appropriately resourced the Police Service. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the police budget was around \$440 million when we came to government, and it is currently over \$550 million. That is an increase of 25 per cent, or some \$110 million. Very few other police budgets around Australia, I expect, have increased by 25 per cent over that period. I do not suggest that the former Government underfunded the police. Some significant increases in the police budget took place during the eight years of the previous Government. The increases were principally during the first four years of that Government, but some significant increases were made. Significant promises were made with the Delta reforms. Former Commissioner Bob Falconer promised a lot, and delivered very little. On top of all that was promised, and given the great position that should have been apparent by the time we came to government in 2001, this Government has since delivered a further 25 per cent increase to the police budget. That is huge.

Also, we are on target to deliver 250 extra police officers. As I said in question time today, we will have recruited to the Police Academy over 1 000 officers by the time we go to the next election. The most recent figure I received was that about 1 017 officers are expected to be recruited. I am told that sufficient capacity exists. If necessary, as a result of attrition or whatever, more than 1 017 officers will be recruited to deliver the 250 extra officers. It is not just a matter of a claim here or there. The Leader of the Opposition plucked some figures and compared them with other figures. The facts are the facts. If the Leader of the Opposition does not agree with the Government's claims on police numbers, surely he understands that the Commissioner of Police is independent. Surely the Leader of the Opposition has some confidence in the integrity of Mr Barry Matthews, our Commissioner of Police, appointed, I note, by the Liberal Government. What does Mr Barry Matthews, the Commissioner of Police in Western Australia, say? He has made comments on this matter repeatedly. He made comment in the estimates committee hearings when the last budget was handed down. He has commented on radio, to newspaper journalists and in many forums since then. As recently as only yesterday, 3 May, at 1.01 pm, on the ABC Radio 720 news, he stated that there is a lot of misrepresentation or just misunderstanding about what is happening; that is, we have been recruiting to replace the ones who have left, plus we have also recruited numbers to make up the 250. He also outlined that by the time the Government goes to the election, we will have 250 extra police over and above those who have left the service, and that we are on target to achieve that.

The Government indicated during the estimates hearings that the Police Service has been given the money. We have said we are on target. The Premier said today that 145 extra officers have been recruited. My understanding is that between now and June - it is next month, I believe - an additional 30 officers will enter the academy. I refer to 30 of the 250 extra officers. That is over and above officers recruited to replace other officers. Before the end of this financial year, 175 officers will be in place, with a further 75 officers recruited in the latter part of this year. That will be 250 police officers recruited over and above the attrition rate. I cannot say it any more clearly. Frankly, if the Opposition persists with its argument, I can only assume that members

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opposite have no faith and confidence in the integrity of the Commissioner of Police. He has categorically stated that we are on target to deliver that number over and above those officers required to cater for attrition.

Another argument put forward by people opposite related to authorised strength. Yes, in an election promise the Government gave a commitment to meet authorised strength. Frankly, my expectation is that all police stations will be staffed to authorised strength. I can state categorically to the House that we have been consistently operating over the authorised strength of the Police Service for at least the past 12 months, the time of which I am aware. Every time I have called for information on our current officer numbers and our authorised strength, there has been anything up to 30 officers over and above the authorised strength of the Police Service. That is a global figure. The Commissioner of Police has operational responsibility to allocate police officers. Interestingly, the Commissioner of Police is the one who determines the authorised strength at any police station, district or unit. He makes a choice whether to staff them at that level. I can say that for any unit, station or district that is under strength, obviously, other stations or units are operating well above authorised strength. Globally the number of police officers we have is over the authorised strength. As a Government there is little more we can do. If we provide the Commissioner of Police in this State and the command team with numbers of police that exceed their authorised strength and they choose not to staff some stations at the authorised strength because they want to technically overstaff another area, surely that is an operational choice for the Commissioner of Police. Like every member of this House, I would not be happy either if the local station in my electorate were understaffed or operating under its authorised strength. However, ultimately it is a decision by the Commissioner of Police -

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: You made a firm election commitment that you would have them at authorised strengths.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Are you ditching your policy now, so it's no longer Labor Party policy?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Again we have a nonsense.

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: It is not nonsense; it is in your policy.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You made a policy commitment.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Are the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition suggesting that I direct the Commissioner of Police to staff every station at authorised strength because I know he has the numbers to do it? Are they suggesting I direct him to do that; or should I have some confidence in his integrity and ability to make the best possible policing decision on behalf of the community of Western Australia?

The numbers have been read out. We have set out targets for priority 1, 2 and 3 calls. Those targets have not been met. I am not happy about that, nor am I happy that an 80-year-old had to ring the Police Service seven times; that is plainly unacceptable. We have increased the Police Service's funding by 25 per cent, giving it another \$110 million, and put the service on target with an additional 250 police officers, yet it still has difficulties. What more can we as a Government do? Members opposite would do well to read the report of the Royal Commission Into Whether There Has Been Any Corrupt or Criminal Conduct by Western Australian Police Officers; clearly they have not read it very well. Members will recall the term "mediocre" was used in the report. Members opposite borrowed a term from another jurisdiction and said that the report had been sexed up. The royal commission report highlighted the facts that we have the best police-to-population ratio of any State of Australia and close to the best level of funding per population of any State and that enormous resources have been given to the Police Service, and it said that despite that, results in a number of areas were mediocre. I recall when the previous Government appointed Commissioner Falconer and its various police ministers said that the Delta reform program that was implemented was the answer, that we were moving forward and the crime problems would be over. In fact, when we came to government we were faced with the highest level of car theft and home burglary in Australia and another category of offence for which we were close to the top. We are about turning around those levels.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Why did you get rid of the immobiliser scheme?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: We have kept the immobiliser scheme. The previous Government had in place a subsidy of \$30, which made very little difference. Quite interestingly, the previous Government wasted a lot of public money because the cost of administering that scheme was greater than the money going into people's pockets. It was a very expensive scheme. We discovered within a number of months of the subsidy being taken away, but the requirement remaining for an immobiliser to be fitted, that the cost of fitting an immobiliser came down by more than \$30. There was therefore no extra cost to people fitting immobilisers and a significant saving to taxpayers in both the subsidy going out and the cost of administering the scheme. However, we found through that and other efforts that there has been a significant turnaround in car theft in this State. We can still do better.

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I do not have the figure in front of me, but I think members will find that since we came to government the reduction in car theft is in the order of 20 per cent; it is a significant reduction. One instance of crime or a road crash is one too many. We would like to see the rate at zero. However, 20 per cent progress in the right direction is not to be sneezed at. Likewise with home burglary, the absolute fixed focus that we have placed on home burglary since the middle of last year has delivered significant dividends. Members opposite can say, "That's okay, but . . ." We have done something that members opposite could not achieve in eight years. At no time during their eight years in government did we see the burglary trend go down. This is a remarkable achievement, and it has been achieved because the Police Service, Commissioner Matthews, Deputy Commissioner Atherton, Superintendent Wayne Gregson and others have absolutely committed themselves to reducing the burglary rate. They have run a particular operation called Operation Clearance, which I highlighted today. That is just one example of the operations they have put in place to target burglary. Our Government funded that operation. We actually said that we wanted burglary tackled and that we were prepared to give the Police Service extra money to do it. The Police Service ran the first stage of Operation Clearance in February 2004. These are the results it got: 167 people charged with 474 charges, including 169 burglary offences, 19 motor vehicle stealing offences, 139 stealing and fraud offences, eight armed robbery offences, five sexual assault offences and 133 miscellaneous offences. More phases of Operation Clearance are planned, as that is the kind of policing program that is delivering results. For the first time that I can recall - I have been looking at police statistics for a long time now - there has been a significant drop in home burglary. I hope the police can further that drop. However, if all they do is maintain that decrease, it will be a huge advance. In the past 10 months, rather than burglary continuing to go up, it has come down by 15 per cent, which is a very significant result. I highlight again today that the flow-on of that result is already being seen in the prison system.

I will talk about our tough approach to crime. An area of most concern for a lot of people is juvenile crime. An interesting fact is that home burglary and burglary are crimes committed largely by juveniles. I highlighted in question time today the figures indicating how many more people are going to jail for home burglary convictions. I have some more interesting figures on juvenile crime as a result of our targeting home burglary. The number of juveniles who went into custody between March 2003 and March 2004 increased by 12 per cent. That indicates to me that the police are in the community doing their job and arresting people for crimes and that, as a result, the number of juveniles who went into custody has increased by 12 per cent. In the past two quarters the number of juveniles who went into custody increased by 25 per cent. A potential range of factors is involved in that figure. One is that the police are in the community doing good work and arresting people and putting them before the courts. Another factor is that somebody new is heading the Children's Court. Another factor is our Government's sentencing policies that are in place. All of those factors have resulted in a 25 per cent increase in the number of juveniles in custody. To me that is very significant. There has been a 45 per cent increase in the past quarter in the number of juveniles in custody for burglary offences. Members must surely draw some conclusion about the good work the police have been doing in the area of burglary when they see a figure such as a 45 per cent increase in the past quarter in the number of juveniles in jail for burglary offences. I believe that many people in the community will applaud our Government for assisting that and creating an environment for that to happen. A total of 83 per cent of juvenile offenders who went into custody in the past quarter went to jail for the first time. We have made a huge range of changes to the legislation to improve law and order in this State and to be tougher on crime.

We have also introduced tougher sentencing laws to make it harder for people to be made eligible for parole and to be released from prison on parole. Between March 2003 and March 2004 there was no increase in the average number of parole or early release orders that were issued, nor in the average number of court supervision orders that were issued. This is another area in which people have said that we are soft on crime and are letting more people out of jail. That is not true. The facts demonstrate that there has been no increase in the number of people released on parole and no increase in the number of early release orders. More people have gone to jail overall, particularly for burglary offences. We are sending the clear message that serious offenders can no longer expect to be released from prison on parole or to be released from the courts on supervision.

We have also enacted truth in sentencing legislation so that the community will know exactly what sentence a person is getting. One of the areas that the Opposition has chosen to criticise is the abolition of sentences of six months or less. The Leader of the Opposition claimed recently that the reason that we abolished sentences of six months or less was to save money, and that this was allowing dangerous offenders to be released into the community. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. It is interesting to look at the situation that existed when members opposite were in government. In 1996 the Court Government, in which the current Leader of the Opposition was the Deputy Premier, introduced home detention for offenders who were serving sentences of less than 12 months. It did that to save money, and it did save money. However, one of the results of that was the tragic Coates case, in which a person was murdered by someone who was subject to home detention monitoring. A report was done into that case. However, the former Government never tabled that report and concealed it

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from the Parliament. The former Government's policy on home detention was a complete failure. The former Government was soft on crime. It was our Government that abolished the soft option of home detention that was put in place by the Court Government in 1996.

Between March 2003 and March 2004 the average prisoner population increased by 5.7 per cent. That is certainly not an indication that our changes are about saving money. The greatest increase in prisoner numbers was for burglary offences, with a 19.3 per cent increase. For offences against the person, the increase was 9.8 per cent. There was also a 17 per cent increase in the number of people remanded in custody, with 44 per cent of all remand prisoners being remanded in custody for burglary offences. That is a significant result. One of the other areas of failure by the former Government was in managing sentences, particularly community-based sentences.

The biggest indictment of members opposite can be found in the May 2001 report of the Auditor General entitled "Implementing and Managing Community Based Sentences". That report reflects clearly on the former Government's last term in office. In that report the Auditor General absolutely slams the former Government for its hopeless approach to dealing with offenders in the community. The report revealed inadequate training and staffing, poor breach practices, a failure to properly resource community justice services, overall many poor practices and standards, and case loads for officers that were the highest in Australia. Our Government has toughened up our approach to crime. We have put in place 55 new community corrections staff so that people can be properly and appropriately supervised. We have put an extra \$2 million into programs so that we can hopefully stop people from offending. We have also put in place a new professional practice and standards unit and a centralised breach unit. We have also tabled the Skinner report and have acted swiftly on the recommendations made in that report.

As I said at the outset, I am pleased that we have this opportunity today to place on record the significant achievements of the Gallop Labor Government. We have toughened up our approach to crime. We have increased sentencing. We have in recent times, contrary to what the Opposition has been saying, increased imprisonment rates, particularly for people convicted of home burglary offences. As part of our colossal investment in the Police Service, we have also invested in some key areas. One such area is the DNA legislation. Most other States in Australia put their DNA legislation in place in 2000 and into the early part of 2001. If the former Government had been on the ball and had a real commitment to putting the DNA legislation in place so that it could be used as a tool by police officers, it would have been in place before the last state election. Sadly it was not in place. The police estimates for that year indicated that the former Government was planning to spend just \$1 million to implement the DNA legislation and the programs associated with it. We very quickly, when we first came into government, took a very different approach. We revamped the DNA legislation and made it tougher so that many more people would be required to provide a sample for the DNA database and we would thereby increase the hit rate. On 8 November 2001 we introduced the Criminal Investigation (Identifying People) Bill. We budgeted to spend over \$20 million on DNA programs. That can be compared with the \$1 million that the former Government had planned to spend. That \$1 million would have delivered very little. There has been some criticism about the backlog of samples that need to be dealt with. In Western Australia we have collected 28 497 DNA samples. As a result we have 26 008 profiles on the database. They are significant numbers. However, we realise how significant those numbers are only when we compare them with the figures from other States. New South Wales has collected only 20 000 samples. New South Wales has our population a number of times over, yet it has collected far fewer samples than Western Australia. The comparison with Victoria is even more startling. Victoria has collected only 6 627 samples and has put only 5 673 samples on its database, yet Western Australia has over 26 000 samples on its database. That is a significant difference, and it indicates the level of commitment of this Government to utilising DNA and fingerprint technology to catch offenders. We are getting more and more matches all the time. The best evidence available from overseas indicates that the larger the database, the greater is the chance of getting a match if forensic evidence is collected from a crime scene. Again, it sends the strong message that if people offend, they will be caught. People are often very mindful of how DNA technology can be used to solve high-profile cases such as murders, rapes and serious crimes. However, no-one should underestimate how DNA can be used for what are known as volume crimes and the impact it can have on increasing clearance rates and, hopefully, over time also reducing the rates of those crimes.

We have introduced the Firearms Amendment Bill 2003. That Bill introduces a new circumstance of aggravation and a penalty of 14 years imprisonment for a person who carries an unlicensed firearm and drugs or money; that is, drug dealers. We have toughened the penalties under the Firearms Act. We have also removed the ambiguity about the lawfulness of playing paintball in Western Australia and have provided for the licensing of paintball guns.

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We have introduced the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2003. That Bill will place legislative controls on the sale and supply of chemicals and apparatus used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamines and other drugs. That is a very significant advance. It will close a sentencing anomaly whereby principal offenders in drug trafficking matters are able to receive discounted sentences. It will also enable interstate chemical analysts to tender certificates of their analysis as evidence. We have put in place a range of child protection measures and shortly we will introduce a Bill that will establish a sex offender register.

We have equipped our Police Service with the latest in police-issue guns. Some 4 385 Glock pistols are available to every operational police officer. Since coming to government, we have invested a lot in our Police Service. In particular, we are delivering police numbers, equipment and technology. We put in place occupational health and safety coverage for our police officers, which was long overdue. We have a very proud record of achievement when it comes to supporting the police in this State and supporting the community on policing issues. There is room for improvement and there will probably always be room for improvement. However, we have funded our Police Service to the best it has ever been funded and we have provided for more police officers than ever before. We are well on target to deliver 250 additional police.

The Treasurer will make a further announcement about the police budget today. I have said that it will be \$110 million over three years. I am looking forward to the figure he announces on Thursday and to learn how much our percentage increase has grown over four years. That is something the Opposition did not match when it was in government. If the electors had stuck with the Opposition, there would be no change and only more of the same. There would be an underfunded DNA program and we would be getting fewer results. This Government has made a real difference. There have been recent changes, and I am very pleased that we have responded to community concerns. The commissioner has seen fit to put in place a regional operations group. In excess of 80 full-time equivalents have been taken out of non-frontline policing areas and moved into frontline operational policing within the regional operations group. It may not be exactly the flying squads that we promised, but it goes a long way towards that. The commissioner is able to deliver on that because of the extra police officers and extra resources our Government has delivered to the Police Service.

DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [4.03 pm]: I support this motion. In doing so, I congratulate my local Police Force at Palmyra and Murdoch Police Stations and the Melville security guards, who do a very good job in the area. However, I am not sure whether the Government has taken the statistics into consideration. The population in the south metropolitan area has grown drastically over the past 10 to 20 years and police numbers in the area have failed to match that population growth. The minister said that our police numbers match those of the other States. If we have good police numbers, what is going wrong? Are things going wrong because we are not giving our police enough clerical and administrative support? Are they bulked down with paperwork? Is that why we do not see them driving around the streets? What are police numbers in the other States? Could it be that although, as the minister said, our police numbers are slightly higher than those in some of the other States, people in those States are also very disappointed with the level of support they are given from their police services not only because of personnel but also because the area is not funded appropriately?

Within my electorate, shops and homes are burgled all the time. People who have been brutalised have come to me. Elderly people are prisoners in their own homes. They will go out during the day, but they like to be home by four o'clock or five o'clock in the afternoon because they are frightened. They like to have their doors locked, including their security doors, and they will not open those doors after four o'clock or five o'clock in the afternoon because they are frightened of who may be at the door and of the consequences of opening their doors. Even if people have full security measures, when thieves want to get in, they will get in. They may go in through the roof or through a window. I find it very distressing when people come into my office with fractured ribs, broken jaws and different physical disabilities that have been caused by break-ins. If people ask police officers the cause of crime in our society, most of them will say that it is drugs and money for drugs. Getting money for drugs is a problem not only for teenagers and older people. Only this morning I heard that primary school children are hanging about school grounds after school smoking cannabis, walking on school roofs and vandalising the schools.

The motion states that the Government has a soft-on-crime approach. However, one of the main reasons we are having problems is the Government's soft-on-drugs approach. I congratulate the Government for introducing a Bill that will stop the hoons who are terrorising people on the streets at night and who drive around doing wheelies on the roads. I am very pleased that the minister introduced that legislation. However, I am disappointed that the Government has not given funding support to improve our Police Service.

MRS C.L. EDWARDES (Kingsley) [4.08 pm]: I rise also to support the matter of public interest. The minister's rhetoric does not match the facts. There are fewer police numbers. From June 2001 to February this year, the answers to questions on notice that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services provided revealed

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that there are 25 fewer police. Police numbers are going backwards. Further, answers given by the Minister for Police in response to questions on notice about response times reveal - these are not figures we have made up; they are answers given by the Minister for Police to questions on notice - that it is taking up to 40 minutes to attend to reports of serious crimes such as sexual assault, sudden death and hit-and-run traffic crashes. Why is that? Is it because there are 35 fewer police and that police numbers are going backwards? Is it because the police are now far more involved in paperwork? Fewer unsworn officers are sitting at desks doing the paperwork that the police are now required to do. Is that what it is? We have fewer police officers, and the ones we do have must sit behind a desk and do the paperwork they are required to do as a result of legislation that has been put in place. For example, the paperwork involved as a result of the cannabis and DNA legislation is enormous.

If the number of unsworn staff is reduced and there are fewer police officers, no wonder there is the perception that pizzas can be delivered quicker than police officers can attend a scene. The story in this morning's *The West Australian* is a far more serious illustration of the situation. A vulnerable 80-year-old woman woke to find that she was being burgled and telephoned 9222 1111, the number she was told to phone. She said that it rang out. A police spokesman said that it could not possibly have rung out because it would have diverted to a recorded message. Either way, give us a break! An 80-year-old woman had woken to find she had been robbed. She was fearful for her life and did not know whether the burglar was still in the house. After her first attempt at phoning, she rang 000 and was advised that 000 should be rung only in life-threatening emergencies and that another officer would phone her. When her son arrived he also phoned the police and tried to find out why there was a delay. He received an apology and was given the number of another officer to phone. When he rang the number, his call was diverted to an answering machine. According to the article in *The West Australian*, Mr Di Lello then rang the police station three more times and each time the phone rang out. That is absolutely disgraceful. Surely, in her rhetoric this afternoon the minister could have explained why victims of crime cannot contact the police when they need them. We are talking about an 80-year-old vulnerable woman who had been burgled, and the only voice she could raise on the other end of the phone was on an answering machine. A police spokesperson also told her that Friday afternoons are peak periods. I would hate to think what Friday or Saturday nights are like.

Police stations are no longer open for the hours during which they used to operate. I remind the minister of the advertisement on television. It depicts a burglar stopping in the middle of breaking into premises to tell his companion that it is time to go home because it is five o'clock and that he will see him at nine o'clock in the morning. Those are the hours during which police stations now open. Burglars do not operate from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. The operating hours of the Warwick Police Station have been reduced. I was told by the minister that that has occurred so that more police can operate on the streets. That is nonsense. Police response times have not improved despite reduced opening hours throughout the metropolitan area. The question without notice that I asked today refers to police stations that were open for 24 hours. Palmyra Police Station used to open for 23 hours. The officers at those stations are saying that they are short of staff and that is why their hours of service have been reduced.

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Innaloo) [4.14 pm]: The Opposition has raised what it considers to be an important debate on policing matters while the opposition spokesman on police is not even in the Chamber. I am given to understand that he is touring the United States on an imprest trip. It is lucky that we are not debating the environment because the Opposition does not have an environment spokesperson.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.J. Dean): Order, members!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The Opposition has accused the Government of being in disarray when its police spokesman is not present and it has not appointed an environment spokesman. This is a very shallow and insincere attack on the Government.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 4 May 2004]
p2167c-2176a

Deputy Speaker; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Mr Terry Waldron; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Dr Janet Woollard; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr John Quigley

Ayes (17)

Mr C.J. Barnett	Mrs C.L. Edwardes	Mr B.K. Masters	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan	Mr J.P.D. Edwards	Mr R.N. Sweetman	Mr W.J. McNee (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr M.F. Board	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr M.W. Trenorden	
Dr E. Constable	Mr M.G. House	Mr T.K. Waldron	
Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr R.F. Johnson	Ms S.E. Walker	

Noes (27)

Mr P.W. Andrews	Mr J.N. Hyde	Ms S.M. McHale	Mr E.S. Ripper
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr A.D. McRae	Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mr C.M. Brown	Mr R.C. Kucera	Mr N.R. Marlborough	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.B. D'Orazio	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr P.B. Watson
Dr J.M. Edwards	Ms A.J. MacTiernan	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	Mr M.P. Whitely
Dr G.I. Gallop	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr J.R. Quigley	Ms M.M. Quirk (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs D.J. Guise	Mr M. McGowan	Ms J.A. Radisich	

Pairs

Mr M.J. Birney	Mr S.R. Hill
Mr A.D. Marshall	Mr A.J. Carpenter
Mr R.A. Ainsworth	Mrs C.A. Martin

Independent Pair

Mr P.G. Pandal

Question thus negatived.