

YOUTH CRIME — FORUMS — KIMBERLEY

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [6.36 pm]: Tonight I would like to talk about the crime forums, because I did undertake to the members of the community I met over the last few weeks that I would present a synopsis of those crime forums and some of the good work that the people of the Kimberley have done over the last few days.

Just to give an outline, over the last month or two, there has been an increasing concern, which has been expressed through social media community pages and also directly to me by community members at all levels. I have been working very hard. To the community's credit, there are people who are working very hard, including the member for Kimberley, Divina D'Anna. I give her credit. She is trying to work in very difficult circumstances. I want the house to know that there is a sense of unified effort in the Kimberley to produce an outcome. My role, as a member of the opposition, is to bring more attention to this issue. I committed to the people I met over the last few weeks that I would bring the issue to the attention of this place. It was fantastic to see such a huge response to the forums. Almost 400 people attended at over five locations over five days. It was such an incredible response. The Premier has now made an announcement about taking greater control of what is going on in the Kimberley.

In late January, I began a process in social media to present that we would be having these forums.

On 3 February, we ran some high-frequency radio advertising because we had so much concern from members of the community, and we started on 5 February in Broome. Almost 60 people came to that forum and there was some incredible dialogue. There was an open invitation to everyone, it was an open meeting, and to my knowledge, it is actually the first open meeting with a general invitation since before the election, when a similar forum was held. I know the former minister, Hon Ben Wyatt, came to that, and the Leader of the Opposition was also there. I remind members that at that stage nobody from the government intended to actually come to that forum, but after the ghastly announcement by the Leader of the Opposition —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Rubbish. That is absolute rubbish.

Point of Order

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am sure the President is good at enforcing the fact that all interjections are deemed to be unparliamentary. I am struggling to hear the member over the raucous interjections from the other side. If we could have some quiet.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is also traditional, members, to hear a point of order in silence. If we could get through the member's contribution, that would be useful.

The PRESIDENT: I was allowing some very brief forms of interjection and was just going to turn the microphone on to say exactly the same thing.

Statement Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: On 6 February, we went to Kununurra and again met a similar number; maybe about 50 people turned up. There was a whole cross-section, including people from education and local government. They had all come of their own accord because they wanted to talk about these issues. We heard commentary from the minister to say that these were Liberal Party meetings. I think it was the biggest advertisement to get people out, because on 7 February we met at least two dozen people in Halls Creek. That is a very small town and there were some very informed positions. We met with people involved in dealing with youth activities and it was very fruitful. Again, I am going to present more on some of the outcomes, because there is a lot more detail that I will present over the next few weeks. I want to give an outline of the steps we took. On 8 February, we met at Fitzroy Crossing. Out of respect, I did not advertise the meeting on 8 February; I just said, "We're going to be there if you want to catch up with us, because I know that the community is also doing some incredible work." I spoke to some of the leaders before we met on 8 February. I had been part of a gathering that actually had Senator Pat Dodson present. It was a bipartisan gathering, so I really reflected on that and felt that it was important to have this bipartisanship and give that respect. Notwithstanding the lack of advertising, again quite a good group of people came together to share some of their tragic stories and their suggestions. People really want to discuss these issues. Finally, on 9 February, we had a large turnout, and this was covered and reported in National Indigenous Times. I recommend that members read that article and see the background.

An important part of that was that I promised to that group that I would bring what we call the "Derby charter" to this place. This was driven by the group. They were really focused on what they wanted to occur. There was a hands-up process, using facilitation. The five things they saw as priorities were all focused on getting safety first—getting it safe now. The first one was immediate additional police into the town, and staying there. They said there cannot

just be squads turning up every week or so; they need additional police. We have seen an announcement in the last couple of days by the Premier, so I want to commend the Premier for taking action, overriding and stepping in, because the voices of the community are being heard.

The second thing that came out was that there needs to be more government services located in the Kimberley towns. They are tired of seeing white four-wheel-drives driving into that town every week. Someone mentioned that there are probably about 35 four-wheel drives driving in every week to deliver services. They are driving two hours from Broome, they do a couple of hours' service, and then they drive back. They want to see permanent services in their towns.

Number three was the desire to see more off-campus educational opportunities and a range of different educational opportunities that could deliver outcomes for disadvantaged families that are suffering and disadvantaged kids who actually need to get back into education. There are terribly low education rates at the moment and low attendances at schools. There are some absolutely tragic stories. Sadly, the way certain people in the department have been treated lately just makes the mind boggle, when people are just trying to get results. I will talk more about that later. The fourth issue is safe houses. They believe there should not be children there. We are talking about children aged 14 and under. Under no circumstances should children be wandering the streets after 10 o'clock at night. They have programs in Derby; there are after-school programs and sport that are well attended, but obviously there is a large group of kids who do not attend. They want to see safe houses happening and manned 24/7. There has to be a way to allow safe houses in the Kimberley. There has to be an approach to enable the police, if they see a child on the street, to be able to pick them up and take them somewhere they can be cared for and be safe, if home is not safe. The final point is that they really want to see more action taken on families that are not functioning properly. That could include carrot-and-stick approaches. They believe there has to be some compulsion where there are problems with alcohol abuse in families. There needs to be some very definite processes to make homes safe again.

I want to commend the community for coming up with those five points; there were a number of other things raised, but they were the five priorities. People just want safety. People want to go home at night and know that they will be able to sleep in their beds in safety. They want to know that if they travel to Broome, for example, from Derby, when they return home their house will not have been trashed, their car will not have been stolen and they will actually have a place of safety. As I said in this place the other day, the crime rates in the Kimberley are so terrible—they are 10 to 16 times worse than rates in metropolitan Perth for different categories of crime. If people in Perth had crime reaching 10 to 16 times the current rates, the government would have to resign, quite simply.

That is why I take this seriously, and I have to step up for the community because I have committed to the community that I will speak for them. I am a member of the opposition, and as a member of the opposition I can have a particular voice.