

ROAD SAFETY — COALFIELDS HIGHWAY UPGRADE

662. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Road Safety:

I refer to the spate of tragic deaths on the Coalfields highway and the government's refusal to honour the Liberal Party election promise to invest \$25 million in its upgrade.

- (1) How can the minister say that the government is committed to road safety when he has cut \$230 million in road funding since the 2008–09 budget and when people are dying on roads that are in dire need of upgrading?
- (2) Is he embarrassed that mining companies are now having to pay police to patrol this road, the site of the tragic deaths, when the people of Collie, Eaton, Australind and the South West risk their lives every day on this road?
- (3) What action will the Minister for Road Safety take to improve the safety of the Coalfields highway?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON replied:

I thank the member for Collie–Preston for his question.

- (1)–(3) The member asks what we have done. I can tell him that we have done more in relation to road safety in two years than the previous government did in eight years.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I do treat it seriously.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member should not tell me what to do.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You really are an idiot sometimes!

Mr P. Papalia: You're really under pressure, aren't you?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, I am not under pressure.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, can you come back to the question.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am aware of the recent accidents on that highway, and there is no question that they were tragic. As far as I can make out, one of the accidents seems to have been caused when sunlight hit somebody and the person did not see a big truck coming. I believe that speed was involved in the other one, but I do not want to pre-empt any coronial inquiry that might take place.

The member mentioned the big business end of town in that part of the world and the fact that it is supporting police. That is done in an effort to increase road safety, which I would always encourage. As the Minister for Road Safety, I am now seeing more and more —

Mr M.P. Murray: Paying for your own police?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Isn't that core business for police?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No.

Mr M.P. Murray: So road safety and the police are two different issues?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The previous Labor government left \$800 million worth of unfunded road maintenance.

Mr M.P. Murray: What are you doing? You're the waffler.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Auditor General found that in July 2009.

Ms R. Saffioti: What are you doing about it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: What am I doing about it? That is a good question.

Mr M.P. Murray: Nothing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will be very happy to answer the question, but I will not go up against all the interjections from members opposite. They ask what I am going to do about it. As they are probably aware, I have a Ministerial Council on Road Safety. I am very fortunate —

Mr A.P. O’Gorman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Joondalup!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have a proposal that I am considering at the moment that will see a huge amount of money and commitment go into road safety initiatives. As I say, Labor left it completely unfunded. We are going to do something about it. By having all my colleagues —

Mr M.P. Murray: We had the money in the budget. You took it out.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, the Labor government did not; it dropped it.

Mr M.P. Murray: No, we did not.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, it did. I suggest that the member get his facts straight before he comes in here and starts criticising the government.

Mr M.P. Murray: You don’t care about safety! You don’t care about people’s lives!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member!

Mr M.P. Murray: You’re a bloody disgrace!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Collie; I call you for the first time.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: This is the sort of behaviour the Leader of the Opposition allows his members to perform in this Parliament. The standards in this place have gone down south under his leadership.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah! This is degenerating. You knew I was on my feet. I call you for the first time. We have 10 minutes left of question time. I have given quite a bit of leeway. People have asked three and four questions in one question. Please answer the question and let us continue.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Members would go a very long way to find a minister more committed to road safety than I am. Some members know that. The problem this government faced when it came into government was an international monetary crisis that had a serious effect on the state’s finances, and the previous government had left an \$800 million hole in its road maintenance fund. We are happy to fill that. We will be spending more than \$1 billion on road maintenance. The member asked a question about the road work and safer roads, which are part of the Towards Zero strategy. Although I am the minister responsible for the strategy, the minister responsible for roads and road maintenance is, of course, Hon Simon O’Brien. I can tell members that he is very committed. He has been down to the member for Collie–Preston’s area recently.

Mr M.P. Murray: He wouldn’t meet with me down there on the highway.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I would not want to meet with you anywhere; you are a very obnoxious person, I have to say.

This government takes seriously the Towards Zero strategy. I have been down to the member’s electorate and have met with the members of the Industry Road Safety Alliance there. I am very grateful to them —

Mr M.P. Murray: It must have been a cheque presentation!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member for Collie–Preston was there at the time. Does he not remember? He welcomed me with open arms.

Mr M.P. Murray: What about the Premier’s \$25 million promise before the election? What about that promise? Don’t sit there and waffle.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We will fulfil all our promises, I can tell members. We have been in government for only two years. Before this four and a half year term is completed we will fulfil all our promises. I can tell the member that he will see more money spent on road safety initiatives by this government in this term of office than he will have ever seen in his life before.