



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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DRUG COURT TRIAL

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.44 p.m.): There is not a person on any side of any House of any Parliament in Australia who is not deeply concerned about the drug problem in our society. I recognise what the Premier said earlier. We need a bipartisan approach to address this particularly important issue. I was pleased to hear the member for Ashgrove strongly support the concept of drug courts. What members on this side of the House have said, and what my colleague the Deputy Leader of the National Party and the shadow Attorney-General has said, is that we are offering a bipartisan approach. We are concerned about this issue, and we want to see some action starting to take place. We want to see a drug court trial start as soon as possible.

As members of this House, we are entrusted to make the laws, and it is our responsibility to come up with a better way to combat drugs. It is our responsibility to proclaim laws which will allow people to reclaim the streets. It is simply not good enough that we have elderly women in this State who are too scared to go outside because a teenager in need of a drug fix may grab their handbag. It is simply not good enough that every night a service station attendant or a convenience store attendant goes to work there is a chance that they will be confronted by a heroin addict wielding a blood-filled syringe or some other kind of weapon. Together, we must find a better way to combat the problem of drug-related crime. Drug courts are part of that better way. Drug courts are not a soft "slap them on the wrist" option because we simply do not want addicts to do hard jail time; drug courts are a proven and cost-effective way of getting people off drugs and out of crime.

Let me remind members of exactly how the drug court program works. To complete the program, participants must undertake drug counselling and rehabilitation and must remain drug free for a set period determined by the court. They must undertake community service. They must undertake full-time work. They must be current in all their financial obligations. And they must, if the court prescribes, be involved in a community charity organisation. If they breach the conditions of the drug court, they will find themselves heading straight for jail.

Other members have said—and it is true—that drug courts operate in 48 of the 50 US States, and they have proved to be very effective. A United States federal study shows that only around 4% of those who finish the drug court programs return to crime. I ask members to compare this with the figure for people who go through the normal court structure: 45% of them return to crime. That is 4% versus 45%. And to achieve such an impressive success rate actually saves the taxpayers money. In the United States, it costs something like US\$25,000 to put someone in jail for a year. The cost of the drug court program is about \$1,200 per person. So what would members rather do? Send them to jail at a cost of \$25,000, knowing there is a 45% chance that they will re-offend, or put them through a drug court program at a cost of \$1,200, knowing that there is only a 4% chance that they will reoffend? It is obvious the option we must take.

I call on members on both sides of this House to show some compassion for the victims of drug-related crime and to show some compassion for the drug addicts themselves. I believe that we should get the drug courts up and running and do so right now. It concerns me when I hear what the Attorney-General said when he moved this amendment. It concerns me that this Government is using the complexity of the problem as an excuse for procrastination.

I am reminded of what the member for Indooroopilly said earlier about the issue of fine defaulters. It would have taken five minutes to change the legislation which the then Attorney-General in the coalition Government had brought into this House—five minutes! We do not want to see that procrastination occur in this debate on drug courts.

Time expired.
