



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 27 April 1999

DRUGS

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (7.24 p.m.): It is impossible for those of us with no personal exposure to the effects of heroin and other illegal drug addictions to imagine the suffering and tragedies that so many Australian families are enduring, including many in the Barambah electorate. Drugs respect no person, no calling, no place. The victims are in pleasant country towns as well as in the back alleys of our cities. Many of its victims then attack, rob and murder ordinary law-abiding citizens in order to fund their habit. This tragedy is snowballing at a crushing cost to every Australian. Our politicians are trying to gauge the direction of public opinion on this issue, but it is time they were shoved in the right direction.

At Alcoholics Anonymous the emphasis is on total abstinence. One does not give chardonnay to an alcoholic. Quit is the essence of giving up smoking and people do not torment the quitting smoker with a fragrant cigar. Everyone admits that we have a drug crisis on our hands. We must declare war against illegal drugs, and this war must be fought ruthlessly with manpower and money. The Federal Government must allow the armed forces to participate. A coordinated war council of senior military and civilian police and Customs personnel must be established. Our extensive coastline must be patrolled at saturation levels.

Cape York Peninsula and other remote areas are dotted with World War II emergency airfields. These strips have been used in the past by low-flying twin-engine aircraft to bring in heroin from Asia. Army patrols with the mobility afforded by helicopters would soon close down such operations. Most of these airstrips should be rendered inoperable and the remaining ones required for normal emergency uses should be properly identified and patrolled. News of such an offensive would quickly travel back to those intent on smuggling drugs. Seizure, destruction and/or confiscation of apprehended ships and aircraft must be the order of the day.

The most popular method of drug importation is the shipping container. Armed forces personnel under the direction of senior Customs officers could be used to open up every container. Carefully screened private sector security staff, State emergency personnel and volunteer firefighters could also be additional sources of manpower.

The next stage of this war against illegal drugs will be waged on the streets. Both Federal and State police would need extra manpower in the short term. Senior police officers could be released from routine police work to take on the anti-drug and crime war on our streets if short-term contract officers were employed to relieve them of the mundane chores. Addicts will require medical help and, with the anti-addiction drug Naltrexone, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel. I suggest that drying-out clinics be established to treat alcoholics and drug addicts under the same roof, thereby streamlining and rationalising the procedure.

The law of seizure and confiscation must be uniform across Australia and embrace the families of the traffickers and dealers where the transfer of property and real estate is effected to protect the criminal. Jail sentences must have no-parole provisions. Zero tolerance in its literal interpretation should apply to all offenders except users. The media should be enlisted to ensure the publication of photos, names and addresses of all those who break the drug laws, no matter what their level. In this way the general community can impose the sanctions of shame and condemnation.

Boatloads of illegal immigrants ran aground on our beaches. How many tonnes of drugs have been brought in by better organised groups? There is no doubt that our poorly patrolled coastline is

vulnerable to the landing of illegal drugs. As a matter of national urgency, the Federal Government must establish a national coastguard along the lines of the citizens military forces. The unemployed are a source of manpower and this could perhaps lead to future employment for them.

The war against drugs will come at a great cost, but do we have an alternative? In 1996 we managed to spend \$54m on two native title claims. At the last Federal election, funding of \$34m was provided by the taxpayer. This year \$50m will be spent on the referendum for constitutional change. \$80 billion is spent annually on gambling, with \$40 billion being put through the pokies. Let us address the illegal drug issues seriously.

A four-year term should be enough time to establish statistical history for future strategy needs. The objective should be to cut off supply, ruthlessly punish the importers and dealers and aid the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. The stakes are huge. Every generation is at risk, directly or indirectly. The morale of our communities is declining as this menace grows. Those who preach legal heroin and shooting galleries are preaching defeat. Australians can turn back this threat of illegal drugs, but, because they control the money and the manpower, our politicians must take the lead. There is an Australian saying which I hesitate to use, but in this case I think is very apt: our politicians must get some balls.
