



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (10.50 p.m.): Tonight I have been listening with interest to the debate. It is true that many of my constituents tell me the sorts of things that members opposite have been talking about tonight. Those sorts of comments have been expressed to me either over the telephone or at branch meetings.

Mr Littleproud: You just sunk your mate in Greenslopes.

Dr CLARK: I accept that.

I will continue, because this is a very emotive topic. We acknowledge that law and order is a very emotive topic. In a situation such as this we have a great responsibility to show leadership. That is the point that I wish to make in the debate tonight. We have a responsibility not to fool people into thinking that there are simple solutions to the complex problems that we are experiencing.

In relation to the proposal being put forward tonight, "truth in sentencing" rolls off the tongue, and slogans such as "do the crime, serve the time" are mere slogans and simple solutions. People think, "If only we do this, things will get better. If only we can put people away for longer, if only we increase the sentence, that will fix things." When we take away all of the padding around this proposal, we see that it is really just about increasing the time that people will serve in jail from 80% to 100% or, if the sentence is 10 years', perhaps another five years will be added to that.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: will increasing the time that people spend in jail really give our society a safer environment in which to live? That is the question that we need to ask. Are we really selling a solution to people, or are we really just responding to their anxieties and assumptions? That is why I am saying I am concerned that we are encouraging people to believe in a proposition that is not necessarily true; it does not necessarily mean that, if we keep building more jails and putting people in prison for longer, we will have a better society. We look to America, but that is not an example that we really want to emulate.

Tonight we have heard that if we really want to address this issue and make our society safer—and I know that we all realise this—we have to address the causes of crime based in our families; that we have to get back to a situation where children are brought up knowing right from wrong. If we want the people in our criminal justice system to return to society and to make a contribution to it, we need to place more emphasis than we are currently on rehabilitation. The issue is not the amount of time people spend in jail, that is, unless one considers that just as a punishment. The issue is whether when people come out of jail they will be better people. Will they recognise that they want to live their life in a different way—in a way that will contribute to the community rather than creating victims in our community?

There is no doubt that we are not doing enough to ensure that we are rehabilitating people. We do not challenge people when they say, "You just do a bit of time and then you go on probation." We should be saying to those people, "We should put more emphasis on what happens when people are on parole or are in a halfway house, and we should offer them some really good programs." It is not easy and it is not as though they are getting off lightly. They are still being supervised, and we have an opportunity that we are not taking advantage of to give them the chance to get their life back on track. That is what we are really talking about—having a different kind of values system, being a responsible individual and making a contribution to our society.

In summary, my concern about the debate tonight is that we are encouraging merely simplistic solutions. We need to step back from that and show some leadership and educate the community to accept that there is more to solving this problem than just putting people in jail for longer.
