



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 16 November 2000

PROPERTY CRIME

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.12 p.m.): I rise to second the motion that this House condemns the Police Minister for his failure to stop the increasing rate of property crime that now strikes 1 in 12 Queenslanders each year. It is very interesting that, in the Beattie Government's Crime Prevention Strategy booklet, the Premier says—

"My Government was elected to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime."

It cannot be tough on the causes of crime when it is soft on drugs! Make no mistake, the Beattie Government is soft on drugs.

The National Crime Authority found that 60% of all crime and 80% of all property crime is drug related. A recent study of methadone program participants in Australia found that 78% had been convicted of property offences. In Queensland, alcohol abuse was a key factor in 82% of serious assaults, 63% of street disturbances and 53% of domestic disturbances. Drugs, be they legal or illegal, play a major role in crime in Queensland and they play a pivotal role in property crime—and, of course, that is the essence of the motion moved by the member for Toowoomba South.

But the Beattie Government has not made the connection. The Beattie Government is soft on drugs. The Premier will not rule out heroin shooting galleries. He has postponed a decision on that issue until after the next election, that is all he has done. But what he and his Education Minister have ruled out is a proven drug education program for primary school children. Last month, we exposed the fact that the member for Murrumba had refused to support drug education in Queensland schools. The Minister for Education is on record as saying he does not believe it is the role of Education Queensland to teach children about the dangers of drugs. That was contained in an FOI document we obtained and it was in his own handwriting—that is where it was!

He could not even find \$500,000 to enable the highly effective Life Education program for primary schoolchildren to continue.

Mr Sullivan: \$400,000.

Dr WATSON: It is \$400,000? It was \$500,000 he could not find to support the Life Education program for our schoolchildren.

Under Labor, Queensland spends 50c per child on drug education. Victoria spends \$10 per child on drug education. In three years, the number of young people in Australia who have tried heroin has almost trebled, yet Labor scraps a drug education program that every other State supports. Labor cannot be tough on crime when it is soft on drugs!

We all know there is not just one solution to the drug problem; it has to be attacked on a number of fronts. It took the coalition to shame the Beattie Government into trialling drug courts. Drug courts operate in 48 of 50 American States and they are very effective. My colleague the member for Warwick was the person who shamed the Beattie Government into moving on them. A US study shows that around only 4% of those who finish drug court programs return to crime, but 45% of the people who go through the normal court structure return to crime. That is the kind of difference that exists. Labor has funded only three drug courts in Queensland. That is not near enough! This program needs expanding.

In forming a strategy to lower property crime in Queensland, we also need to address the reasons people get on to drugs in the first place. International experience shows that, to succeed, crime prevention initiatives must focus on reducing social exclusion. Those who feel excluded from participation in community life are more likely to offend against that community.

In March 1998 the coalition introduced a program tailor made to help reduce social exclusion. It was called the Youth Action Program, or generically known as school cadets. This program discourages juvenile delinquency and other antisocial behaviours by actively involving students in local community organisations. It gives them hands-on courses in school time with terrific organisations like surf-lifesaving, the State Emergency Service, Red Cross, Scouts, Guides and Coast Guard, as well as the more conventional cadet groups like the Army, Navy or Air Force. This program not only teaches new disciplines but helps build vital bridges between young people and their communities. It fights social exclusion. We plan to trial the Youth Action Program in 10 schools initially and then roll it out across the State. But under Labor, under the Government of those opposite, this highly effective program has been limited to just 35 State high schools.

A coalition Government will make this program available to every high school, public or private, in Queensland.

Time expired.
