



Speech by

Hon. Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard Wednesday, 19 August 2009

CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (7.35 pm), continuing in reply: Before the break I was reassuring the member for Gladstone that strip searches are only conducted on prisoners and not visitors. Hopefully that will allay the concerns of one of her constituents who wishes to visit her husband, who is in jail.

I now want to respond to claims made by a number of members. The member for Glass House claimed that jobs would be lost at Woodford Correctional Centre. The centre is currently operating at well below capacity. The commissioner of corrections proposes to temporarily decommission 170 beds at Woodford Correctional Centre. It is obvious that the member for Glass House would rather have staff guarding empty beds. I am advised by the commissioner that there will be no forced job losses as a result of a temporary decommissioning of these beds. Queensland Corrective Services will form a joint task force with the Queensland Public Sector Union to address workforce impacts and establish case management for affected staff. The union and Queensland Corrective Services will work together to ensure the best outcome for those affected. That will include a range of initiatives to reduce the impact. Recruitment of staff has temporarily ceased, any known requests for transfers are being actioned, and offers to staff to transfer and relocate to other facilities are also being handled through that process. I just reiterate that there will be no forced job losses during that process.

I will make a few brief comments about the contributions of individual members. The member for Albert spoke positively about a constituent who was a former corrective services officer, and also her support for the extension of parole board time frames and prisoner artwork provisions. The member for Kawana made a bizarre contribution which deserves no further comment. The member for Mirani spoke of a decision to house supervised sex offenders on the prison reserve at Rockhampton. However, the member offers no solution to housing these offenders as they are transitioned back into the community once they have completed their custodial sentence.

The member for Mudgeeraba spoke of the abolition of reintegration and resettlement leave. The member for Broadwater spoke of her support of the prisoner artwork provisions and the artwork program, particularly the need to ensure that prisoners do not profit from their artwork while in jail. The member for Toowoomba North reiterated the importance of community work projects involving low-risk prisoners and highlighted the rehabilitative benefits of the Pups in Prison program delivered at the Darling Downs Correctional Centre in conjunction with Assistance Dogs Australia.

The member for Lockyer noted the establishment of the new prison precinct in Gatton, in his electorate. He would be aware that the establishment of that prison precinct will provide a massive long-term economic benefit to the Gatton community and region which will sustain employment in that area for years to come. Curiously, though, the member for Lockyer seemed to argue that the prison was too far away from public transport and that people would have to make STD calls. I can only assume by his argument that he is arguing the prison should not proceed there and should be relocated to another site.

I am sure that his Gatton constituents who will rely upon the work and the economic benefit that this prison will deliver to his region will not be too impressed with that.

The member for Chatsworth spoke in support of extending the victims register to victims of offenders under the dangerous prisoner sexual offender supervision orders. I also thank him for acknowledging the efforts of Queensland Corrective Services in encouraging more Indigenous victims to register. That was a significant piece of work undertaken by the department.

The member for Morayfield supported the abolition of resettlement and reintegration leave and its replacement with structured evidence based transition arrangements. The member for Woodridge also offered the support of the artwork provisions, which aim to prevent prisoners profiting from their artwork whilst in jail, and also spoke about some of her local community groups which provide support to victims and measures to help offenders reintegrate back into the community.

The member for Burdekin claimed that our prisons are currently overcrowded. Obviously the member does not recall or does not know that the prison capacity in Queensland is currently 15 per cent under. We have 15 per cent spare capacity, in stark contrast to when the National Party was last in government when they were 15 per cent overcapacity and double-ups were the norm across the state.

I welcome the member for Redlands' description of the bill as progressive. However, I note that he claimed the proposed provisions would not prevent prisoners from selling their artwork but simply did not offer any explanations or solutions. The member for Mount Ommaney supported the work of work camps as a means of reintegration and supported the abolition of reintegration and resettlement leave.

The member for Capalaba spoke about the restrictions being placed on prisoner trust accounts and also supported the prisoner artwork provisions, and again the need to ensure that prisoners do not profit from their artwork while in jail.

The member for Gaven talked about the level of drug detection in jails. Again, as with other members, he failed to acknowledge that under the previous National Party government the rate of positive drug tests was 17.9 per cent for prisoners. Under Labor in the year up to 31 March this year, the rate was 3.14 per cent—so a world of difference.

Finally, the member for Currumbin raised issues about the interim access approvals, which I have already discussed and addressed. She also argued that Queensland Corrective Services should have a preferred list of contractors to work in prisons. This was in relation to the emergency access arrangement for contractors. For the member's benefit, Queensland Corrective Services already has such an arrangement in place. In fact, QCS usually sources its contractors through QBuild, which has compiled a list of preferred contractors who have all been through the security checks.

With regard to prison security, we cannot forget that the last escapes in Queensland from secure custody were under the Borbidge led National Party government. Two lots of five prisoners escaped from high-security prisons within a matter of weeks. Who can forget how Brendon Abbott, with the support of a young protege providing a salvo of shots from outside the jail, Australia's most notorious bank robber and four dangerous prisoners calmly made their way to the perimeter fence, cut their way through it and fled in a getaway vehicle.

That is the record of the National Party government when it comes to prison security in Queensland. The last prisoner escaping from secure custody was under a Borbidge led National Party government.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Pitt): Order!

Mr ROBERTS: Those escapees then led authorities on a costly nationwide chase for weeks before Abbott was caught in Darwin and sent back in prison in Queensland where he remains in maximum security.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South will address his comments through the chair.

Mr ROBERTS: In conclusion, I again place on record my thanks to all members for their contributions.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South!

Mr ROBERTS: I particularly acknowledge again and thank the former minister, Judy Spence, her staff and the departmental officers for all the work they did in preparing and compiling this bill. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.