




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2016

YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015; YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (11.02 pm): I rise to add my contribution to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I start by acknowledging the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, the chair and the secretariat for allowing me to join them in Townsville during the public hearing into this bill.

History will show that the former Newman government went about implementing a safer streets crime action plan. The Newman government implemented the boot camp for motor vehicle youth crimes. I will say at the outset that this was a complete and utter failure from the start. These camps should be shown for the failures that they really were. The camps represented a gross loss of taxpayers' money, with the spend blowing out by millions of dollars.

I have to address the elephant in the room, the Lincoln Springs boot camp. Those operators were also known LNP supporters, donating funds to the LNP. I point out the fact that they were still awarded the boot camp against departmental advice to go to another tenderer, but that just shows the complete lack of transparency and lack of integrity. It is that same old rhetoric from the LNP. It was a complete waste of time.

The report from Queensland Auditor-General, Andrew Greaves—and I will table that in a minute—raised concerns about favouritism and cost blowouts after examining the Newman government youth boot camp program. The report, which was tabled in parliament—and I have an excerpt here—said the Fraser Coast and Lincoln Springs boot camp providers were chosen even though suitable, lower cost options were available. One of those options was Project Youfla that was run by Indigenous elders. They did not get a look-in. It is disgusting. In his report, Mr Greaves said that the former government was left 'open to accusations of favouritism'. The report said the trial was not fully costed, and the cost had increased from \$4.9 million to a whopping \$12.3 million over two years, and for what? Former attorney-general Jarrod Bleijie announced the new boot camp at Lincoln Springs and Beyond Billabong west of Ingham. The report also talks about the recidivism rates from those boot camps. It is right up there at 68 per cent. This completely wasted everybody's time.

The previous speaker, the member for Burdekin, talked about his time as a police officer. I acknowledge his 25 years, but I have to tell the House that as a 25-year veteran paramedic in Townsville I have also had to deal with a range of motor vehicle thefts over the time, and guess what? They also occurred in the Newman era; 2012 to 2015 was no different at all.

What are we doing as local members? I am passionate about addressing youth crime challenges in Thuringowa and Townsville. That takes a collaborative effort. I have got great working relationships with a lot of those police officers from my former career. We are getting on with the job of working with the community to address those issues.

It would be completely remiss of me when I talk about Lincoln Springs not to share with the House and put on record our own 'choppergate' in Townsville. The former attorney-general, the member for Kawana, took the former member for Thuringowa, Sam Cox, to Lincoln Springs for a site visit. I guess it was just too hard to hire a four-wheel drive and drive there, but who cares about the taxpayers? After the release of the Auditor-General's report into boot camps, I had plenty of media asking me, 'Have you hired a chopper in your time as the member for Thuringowa?' I had to confess that I had been on a helicopter many times, clocking up thousands of hours. I know how much they cost. I was on a rescue helicopter. It costs thousands of dollars an hour. What a complete waste of time. I say to the former members, 'Poor choice, old chaps. Poor choice, indeed.'

I note the other passenger—and we had some members over there looking at the notes from that public hearing in Townsville—was Torhild Parkinson, with whom I have great interactions and who certainly works with the police. She gave evidence at that parliamentary hearing. She got a helicopter ride, and she said that the boot camps did in fact represent a complete and gross waste of taxpayers' money. The previous Newman LNP government should hang their heads in shame. They failed the hardworking people of this state by creating these holiday boot camps and all the time not really addressing the problems of juvenile crime.

The LNP did even more damage. They withdrew things like the Sentencing Advisory Council, the Murri Court and court conferencing. I am glad the member for Coomera has spoken, because during his speech he said that court conferencing may reduce recidivism. Members will have to check *Hansard* for that. I must thank the member for Coomera because he did not say it once, he said it twice. I thank him for supporting the bill. We will get on with returning these important policies and legislation to address the issue.

We know that any repealing of the Newman government Youth Justice Act by our government reflects international evidence that increasing the severity of punishment is ineffective in reducing recidivism, particularly by children and young people. One of the hallmarks of this bill will be the reinstatement of the Childrens Court of Queensland sentence review jurisdiction and expanding the jurisdiction to include the magistrates' decisions in relation to breaches of the community based orders.

After the parliamentary hearing by the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee in Townsville, I was taken aside by a well-experienced fellow, a solicitor, who told me that one of the best things we were doing as a government was reinstating the Murri Court. It is now back in place and I thank the Attorney-General for that because he told me that it worked. We have many well-respected Indigenous elders in Townsville who can now assist the magistrate in decisions affecting our Indigenous youth, who are sadly overrepresented in our courts.

The member for Beaudesert tried to talk about Uncle Alfred, and I could not quite hear what he was saying. I can tell him that it is Uncle Alfred's men's group. He has been around for a while and I have had several interactions with him. He came along to a private discussion before that youth justice forum and he talked about the importance of taking people back to country. He does it as a volunteer. He needs some local support, and we are doing that.

Court conferencing is where the victim gets to sit face-to-face with the young offender to articulate the effects of the intrusion and subsequent issues for that person. I was told reliably that this was entirely a good thing for these young offenders, with evidence showing a significant reduction in recidivism when they had to face their victims. The guilt often expressed by these young offenders was a telling factor in turning their lives around.

I commend the Attorney-General for reintroducing the Sentencing Advisory Council which I believe will further educate and inform the public in our community of appropriate sentencing when someone commits a crime. All in our community have an expectation to feel safe in our own homes and that when a criminal offence occurs appropriate sentencing is applied. I do believe the reinstatement of the Sentencing Advisory Council will address those expectations.

On 6 June we held a community forum in Townsville on youth justice. All three Townsville members have heard the community on issues surrounding youth crime. We asked the Attorney-General and the police minister to come to Townsville—

Mr Costigan: What was the outcome? List the outcomes.

Mr HARPER: The member will hear if he stops interrupting. We asked them to come and hear their concerns. Whilst there has been a recent spike in vehicle theft, all three members at that forum—

Mr Mander interjected.

Mr Byrne interjected.

Mr HARPER: They do not like it, do they?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! Member for Thuringowa. If the member for Everton and the Minister for Police wish to have a conversation, perhaps they can do so outside the chamber rather than across the chamber.

Mr HARPER: Of course, all agreed that Townsville is not, in fact, the crime capital of Queensland, and our communities' challenges were not helped by the LNP stripping away those legislative policies. It should not define us as a city because we know the biggest issues are job creation and education, which we are getting on with delivering.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr HARPER: Yes, we are. It is called a stadium. What that forum did do was bring together a community who spoke with emotion and a strong desire to address the recent challenges of youth crime in a collaborative way. So we had—

Mr Mander: What was the practical outcome?

Mr HARPER: I will tell you if you want to take the time because—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Thuringowa, I would ask that you direct your comments through the chair—not to either the member for Everton or the member for Whitsunday, but through the chair.

Mr HARPER: I turn now to justice and reinvestment. We are going to support things like Project Booyah. I am going to talk about Alice Lawrence, who got up bravely at that forum and talked about her 14-year-old son, Sonny, and the success of that great program. I am going to another graduation next Wednesday. We are going to get on with supporting community based programs to get our kids early, stop them going into detention centres, get them employed and go on to contribute as a great citizen in our community. We are getting the job done and undoing all the bad things that the LNP took away.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Townsville Bulletin* app, undated, titled 'Project gives positive direction: Role model life changer' [\[1005\]](#).