




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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.34 am): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate. I think everybody here is of the opinion that we have a problem with some of our youth and the amount of recidivism that exists in not only Townsville but other communities. The question is: what is driving that and what should we do about it?

We have a program that was implemented but, because the program was implemented by us, it seems to be getting torn down. I would be really interested to see and understand the evidence that says there was not one shred of anything useful in this, but that evidence has not been produced. The simple fact is that, if the government want to make a change because they want to make a political statement and they want to oppose the things the LNP did, that is fine. They are the government, albeit minority. I heard someone saying earlier that the people of Queensland voted, but they certainly did not vote for Labor in the majority because we got the higher vote. They are the government and the government's objective should be to make Queensland a better place, particularly for our young people.

What they really need are some jobs, some opportunities, some decent structure in their lives and some decent education. In Toowoomba we have the Toowoomba Flexi School which tries to catch some of these people before they start committing these crimes and before they get involved in a slippery slope that might lead to them being diverted off to a boot camp or into other programs. Instead of looking at everything that we did and saying that it was bad, the government should look at what we did that was good and enhance that. In that way, we will actually develop some decent legislation, as opposed to just a kneejerk reaction that is all about trying to show the various people out there that we have a different approach to crime. Some would say it is a soft approach on crime; others would say the Labor side is more caring.

The simple fact is it is not caring to leave these poor kids in desperate situations where they are searching around in their lives for some answers, some thrills, some excitement, someone to care for them or whatever it is. They need to learn some internal resilience. They need to understand that the community has some expectations of them if they want to participate in the community. They need to be taught that they have to take responsibility for what they have done. If they have done some bad things that have caused other people problems, there is a consequence to that. At the same time, however, they need to be given some compassion and maybe some training and they need to learn some resilience and some understanding. We called that a boot camp. It is not such a strange and peculiar idea and it is one that could have been built on.

Instead of that, what do we get? We do not wait for any evidence. We do not look at any solutions. We simply turn around because they are the Labor Party and we are the LNP and whatever we did must be bad in their eyes. That is simply not the case. The facts of the matter are that there were some

successes with this program, and I am sure given time the evidence would have been able to be gathered to show what they were and they could have been enhanced. As a conservative person, to be able to build on enhancement of legislation and enhancement of programs over a period of time is a sensible, logical way forward. Some arbitrary, kneejerk revolution every time they clutch on to power—albeit with the help of a few Independents—is not really going to lead to a long-term solution to this long-term problem that exists out there in our society.

This problem is not going to go away by having a few consultative meetings. This problem is becoming intergenerational. This problem needs individuals to learn some responsibility. This problem is going to need some serious resources put into it over a period of time.

In my opinion, simply going soft on the people who have done that is really unfortunate for the rest of the community. There are other people out there who are obeying the rules, who are leading their lives the right way. They are facing the struggles and taking responsibility. To start wrapping more and more resources around somebody to give them a better life than some of the people they have been committing offences against is grossly unjust. Some of the so-called holiday camps that existed for youth offenders when we came into government were outrageous. People were trying to get back into these places because they got some decent meals provided for them, they could ride bucking bulls and they could play the PlayStation and other things.

This was the best environment they had had in their lives. We cannot have people out there aspiring to commit crimes over and over so that they can get locked up and be in a better environment than the one they came from. We have to help them learn, understand and respect themselves and the responsibility they face in making something of their lives. Going soft on that is not going to achieve that. It is certainly disrespectful to the other people in the community against whom they have offended who are facing those same struggles and challenges but are dealing with them in a way that respects all of us and the laws that exist.

I say to the Attorney-General that if all she wants to do when she comes into this place is undo everything that was done before, then that is a sad indictment on our political system and one she really needs to think through. If her solution to everything is not to wait to see what works, find out what is good in it and then move forward, but to simply tear it down because it was someone else's idea and concept and not wait for the evidence to come in, I think that is bad policy and something that should not happen.

I will be opposing this legislation on the simple principle that the trials that were put in place really needed more time and more evidence gathered so that we could work out which bits will lead to a better outcome for our community rather than simply introducing kneejerk legislation and throwing around cheap slogans such as, 'We're caring; they're harsh.' All of these sorts of things will not solve the problem. There is certainly a big chunk of the community out there who would see this approach as being soft on crime. The reality is that if that reflects how the community feels, then they need to be listened to and that needs to be respected. That needs to be considered when the government are working out how they are going to treat and deal with this serious recidivism that exists. They cannot simply throw away the fact that the community think they are soft on crime by saying, 'That's because you have scared them into the slogan.' That is not the case at all. The reason they think the government are soft on crime is that the evidence is in front of them and the circumstances that are there. I would urge the minister to look for the good—

Mr Russo interjected.

Mr WATTS: The member asks, 'What evidence is it?' He should go and ask someone in Townsville what evidence is there of the recidivism in crime of young people in Townsville. Have you not been listening to the debate? I know it is late, but it has been going for a while.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! I ask the member to please direct his comments through the chair.

Mr WATTS: Absolutely, I will put my comments through the chair. I am being asked by the member for Sunnybank as to what evidence is there. I would suggest that before his travel allowance expires he books himself a ticket and goes and walks around some of the streets in some of the suburbs and communities and he gathers some of the data firsthand for himself. He could go and do a ride along with some of the police. He should go and have a look at what is going on out there in the community and gather the evidence himself. He has been brought into this place with a responsibility, which is to make sure that the community is better with the legislation we pass in this place than it was when we came into this place. Simple kneejerk reactions without waiting for legislation that has been put in place to have an effect and to have that effect measured and then debated as to which elements were good is a naive way to go about drafting legislation.

We know that this was the government's kneejerk reaction to what we did. We know that they did not like the approach that we took. If they think that that kneejerk is going to lead to a solution, they are a lot more naive than I thought they were. They need to look for what has worked in legislation that was put in place. What were the elements of the boot camps that were good? What are the things that seem to have an effect? Go and gather that evidence and then enhance it by making the necessary changes to get a better outcome rather than simply throwing around a few slogans and saying, 'We've got all the solutions. Here's my brochure.'