

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 25 November 2009

PRISONERS — EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

940. Dr M.D. NAHAN to the Minister for Corrective Services:

The government inherited a prison system that had been neglected and underfunded by the previous Labor Party administration, with no new prison beds having been provided in eight years, despite large increases in prison numbers. With respect to the importance the government places on prisoner rehabilitation, can the minister advise members of achievements in education and training programs provided by the Liberal-National government in just over a year of government?

Mr C.C. PORTER replied:

I thank the member for his question.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: The safe-breaking course is doing really well.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, that comment was not necessary at all. I call you formally for the second time.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Some very prestigious awards were given out at an event held in Canberra recently. It was attended by our very excellent education minister. One of those awards was presented by the federal Minister for Education and Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Julia Gillard. That award went to the education and vocational training unit within the Department of Corrective Services. These are the peak national awards for vocational education and training. They recognise innovation and excellence in that field. It was an extremely competitive field. What a remarkable and marvellous thing that it was won by the Department of Corrective Services' education and training unit. Its winning initiative was its Through Care education model. The difference between this and a range of what have historically been given as education and training programs is that this model does not stop at the point of entry back into the community. Instead there is education and training whilst in incarceration and then follow through to ensure that people are supported in education and employment in the community. This really does take the delivery of programs to a new level. It is very intensive. What is absolutely remarkable about it is that we currently have 540 prisoners who have been case managed under this program, 46 per cent of whom are Indigenous. Of the 107 prisoners who have successfully been placed into employment through this program, the rate of reoffending has been 14 per cent. In some areas in Australia and with some prison releases we get rates of reoffending in excess of 60 per cent. This is an absolutely remarkable program. This is one part of an overall colossal improvement in the way that we are delivering programs into prisons. We have the first quarterly figures for this year.

Mr P. Papalia: It was a good Labor program, wasn't it? Is it the prisoner employment program?

Mr C.C. PORTER: No, it is separate to that program.

Mr P. Papalia: The prisoner employment officers are implementing it.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Prisoner employment officers are involved in it. I guess the point the member for Warnbro is trying to make is that he would like a comparison between how we are going and how the Labor Party travelled in the same area. Remarkably, I have just such data!

Mr E.S. Ripper: The Minister for Education doesn't.

Mr C.C. PORTER: I have enough data to go around. The data shows that 525 offenders commenced a program in the first quarter of 2009-10. We project 2 052 enrolments in programs for this year. That is an increase of 68 per cent on last year. When we compare it with the last year of Labor, the programs we are delivering to prisoners in the system represent an increase of 143 per cent. We have done that with the same budget. The Treasurer would be very happy.

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: No, we are not giving any back. One of the other excellent initiatives is that we formed a new unit specifically for training, education and offender program delivery for Indigenous prisoners. Last year's data shows a 61 per cent increase in delivery of programs to Aboriginal prisoners. We expect to build on that quite impressively this year. Notwithstanding some of the constraints and challenges in the prison system, in the key area that reduces recidivism and improves the lives of prisoners, we are doing 143 per cent better than the other people.