

CORRECTIVE SERVICES — PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PRISONS

945. Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE to the Minister for Corrective Services:

Before I ask my question, I would like to acknowledge the staff and student leaders from Maida Vale Primary School in the member for Forrestfield's electorate.

I note the recent release of the Economic Regulation Authority's report on the Western Australian prison system. Can the minister inform the house of the report's findings in relation to the performance of public and private prisons?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Churchlands for his continued interest in any government agency —
Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I thank him for his continued interest in any government agency in which there is an opportunity to increase the return to the taxpayers of Western Australia and to get better value for their dollar.

I start by very warmly welcoming the ERA's report into the prison system. If anything, the report supports the government's reform agenda in the Department of Corrective Services, which is something that the opposition obviously does not even believe or acknowledge is required. The ERA report made very clear its support of our reform agenda, including such things as the re-tendering of the court security and customer deal services contract; entering into relationships and contracts with Aboriginal organisations to reduce the reoffending rate of Aboriginals in the prison system; benchmarking prisons so that we can compare those that are performing better against those that could do a bit more lifting; and improving the department's data collection and transparency systems.

We admit that we are always open to new ideas and to opportunities to try to do things even better than we are at the moment. One way of doing that is to look at the ways in which the private prison system is doing things better than the public prison system and to try to take those good parts from the private prison system and apply them to the public prison system. We have only to look at the Wandoo Reintegration Facility for young adults in the member for Bateman's electorate, formerly in my electorate, which houses about 70 young adults, predominantly Aboriginal men, and how well it is doing compared with the public prison system. For example, the number of Aboriginal detainees released from Wandoo who reoffended upon release is zero.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Zero have reoffended. In fact, the overall reoffending rate for detainees released from that facility, including non-Aboriginal detainees, is about 20 per cent, which is half the 40 per cent rate of the public prison system. When we reduce reoffending rates, we have a much better value-for-money outcome because taxpayers are not paying to lock them up again and again. Almost 100 per cent of the detainees who come out of that facility are ready to go into a job, training or further education. Can the public prison system learn something from the private prison system? Absolutely. In fact, it is worth noting what the Labor Party would do with Wandoo if it were ever to win government. The WA Labor Party's 2015 platform reads, at point 46 —

WA Labor will ensure that public services such as:

...

h) prisons, juvenile detention centres, prisoner transport and community justice;

...

k) are not further privatised, and where they have been, they will be brought back into government control and operation in a responsible manner.

What the Labor Party would do to the justice system and to the Department of Corrective Services would be catastrophic. If it ever won government, it would be absolutely catastrophic. The bottom line is that the opposition is so beholden to and enslaved by the union movement that it would put the interests of good public policy behind the interests of the unions. It would put the interests of the taxpayers behind the interests of —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, I call you to order for the second time. Minister: a quick answer, please.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It would put the interests of the union movement ahead of those of vulnerable offenders; it would put the interests of the union movement in front of the interests of the taxpayers. Clearly, there are a lot of

things we can take away from the private prison system and apply to the public prison system, and clearly there are a lot of lessons we can learn. If the Labor Party ever gets into government, it will absolutely destroy all the good things that have happened in this space, which is exactly why it will never be fit to govern.