

POLICE — VOLUNTARY SEVERANCES

861. Mrs M.H. ROBERTS to the Minister for Police:

I have a supplementary question. In the budget estimates hearings we were told that the minister needed to cut \$37 million as part of the Treasurer's efficiency dividend, together with the \$37 million that now needs to be found. How is the minister making \$74 million worth of cuts?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

Once again I relish the opportunity to congratulate the Commissioner of Police and WA Police on the way that they have diligently applied the ruler to all of their spending, because they have done an amazing thing with their budget in finding this \$37 million. They have found it in order to prioritise front-line policing services and to increase our capacity —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: They found it, member for Midland, and it is a great thing because 196 police officers now have a voluntary severance package and we can increase our capacity to the front line. PRISON ESCAPES

862. Mr G.M. CASTRILLI to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I note opposition comments criticising the government for unsuccessful prison escape attempts. With this in mind, can the minister please inform the house of the current situation relating to prison escapes and how it compares with previous years?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for his question and for his interest in corrective services. Obviously, Bunbury Regional Prison is in his part of the world and I place on the record my acknowledgement of his spearheading of the Choose Respect campaign, which started in Bunbury Regional Prison, with great results. Well done, member for Bunbury.

It is worth noting that when someone escapes from custody, it is obviously a bad thing and it means that something, somewhere has gone wrong. No-one wants to see anyone escape from lawful custody, but the test of a good, mature and adult government is in how it addresses things that go wrong.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: A good government identifies the weakest link to make sure that these things do not happen again. Obviously, what an immature and non-adult opposition does is try to blame everything that goes wrong on the government. That is exactly what has been happening in the past few months. If someone escapes custody, suddenly it is the government's fault. I thought it was worthwhile going back through history to have a look at what exactly has happened with the prison population across Western Australia and how many people have escaped every year as the population has changed, because I think we have to compare apples with apples and also look at ratios.

Members might be interested to know that, back in 2001, there were 3 117 people in WA prisons as the daily average prison population; it is now about 4 950.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Cannington. I call you to order for the second time. If you want to have a private conversation with your colleagues, go outside.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The prison population has gone from 3 117 in 2001 to just under 5 000 prisoners in 2013. In 2001, 72 prisoners escaped; last financial year, that number was down to nine. To put that ratio into further perspective for members, in 2001 2.3 per cent of prisoners escaped lawful custody; in 2013, that figure is 0.18 per cent, which is a significant decline in the number of people escaping from prisons. There are a number of different reasons why this is happening, including improved prisoner security ratings and intelligence-focused security within the prison system. The Justice Intelligence Service is obviously doing a lot of work to try to detect in advance when people are trying to get out of prison. Obviously, the 5 000 people in jail are not exactly pillars of society and a lot of them do not want to be there and spend a lot of time trying to think of constructive ways to escape. Also key to this is a significant investment—I will give some credit to the opposition—in trying to get Indigenous Western Australians to do their time out in country so that they are closer to their families and

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 27 November 2013]

p6729b-6730a

Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Joe Francis

community support networks. I think that is a good thing, and we should strive to continue doing that, as we are doing out in Kalgoorlie.

To put this into focus, what I have come up with —

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I know I have been outdone by the Minister for Planning, but this table indicates the number of people who have escaped from prisons from 2001 down to the most recent financial year. Something really interesting happened here, and once again it reflects a change of government. The government changed at this point, and we can see the overwhelming number of people who escaped from prisons under the Labor government compared with the number escaping now. I think it is a bit rich for the Labor Party to try to say that every single time somebody escapes from prison it is the fault of the government. I ask the member for Warnbro: if that is chaos, what does he call this? There was disgraceful chaos under his government, which he was obviously a part of, even back in 2007.

The SPEAKER: Minister, wind up, please.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Absolutely. This does not even talk about those who escaped from court security. When it comes to court security, we have only to go back and look at one of the darkest days of the Labor government, 11 June 2004, when nine adults escaped in one day from the Supreme Court. If we have chaos now, member for Warnbro, God knows what he called it when he was in government.