

CASHLESS WELFARE DEBIT CARD

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [6.30 pm]: I rise to speak about the cashless welfare debit card, particularly in response to a visit to the goldfields by me and the Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, Libby Mettam, MLA, from the other place on 8 March. We travelled to Laverton and Leonora, and it was quite heartbreaking to hear stories from community members, Indigenous leaders and shire presidents about the impact of the removal of the cashless welfare cards on those communities. I know things have been said by people who revolve in much higher circles than anyone here in places like Victoria or other parts of Australia and who have opinions and say there is no evidence about the impact of the cashless welfare card. All I can say to those people, who probably are not listening and do not care about what goes on in places like Laverton, Leonora or Kununurra, is that they should look at the data. Sadly, data does not explain things in the same way as the very emotional presentation by people who have to live things, including, may I say, members of the police. The Commissioner of Police supports the cashless welfare card and the rank and file support it. Any members of the police who live and work in those towns support the cashless welfare card, and its removal had a direct and immediate impact. There is data on the police website. As I said, data and numbers do not really portray the harm and pain that people feel. There are stories of older community members who have had standover tactics done on them and who have had to withdraw money from ATMs. There is the story of watching a 17-year-old male under the influence of alcohol beating up and assaulting his 15-year-old girlfriend in a car park and there having to be intervention. There are stories of all the terrible woundings, stabbings and assaults that mainly affect women. They are terrible stories that I am not best placed to share in the way that those people affected shared them. Those stories really impact, but the numbers also tell a story that I think people should know.

In Laverton, in the quarter when the cashless welfare card was in place, there were 36 crimes against persons. Crimes against persons is a category of assaults—of beatings. They were family and non-family assaults, and there were 36, which is too many for a small town like Laverton. In the quarter when the cashless welfare card was removed there were 53. There is a direct impact. I challenge anybody who does not support the card to look at those numbers and reflect for a moment on those people who are suffering. There is no silver bullet for the difficult issue of alcohol abuse. We must deal with communities sensitively, but at the end of the day we have to do everything in our power to reduce those terrible assaults and problems that occur on a daily basis. In the town of Leonora, the figures were 25 crimes against persons in the quarter when the card was in place, and when the card was removed, there were 34. Those numbers are now at record levels.

I support the state government's efforts in relation alcohol restrictions. There was some debate about this in the other place. The minister has come a bit late to the issue, but I am glad it is better late than never. The minister has moved on places like Carnarvon, for example. I have been calling for things, even before coming into this place. I worked with the Kimberley Zone in support of the introduction of better controls on the banned drinkers register and a more effective banned drinkers register. There have to be solutions. I support the government in making that banned drinkers register more effective. We have to have multiple tools at our disposal. But it is interesting that there is a level of hypocrisy that we cannot get past in that the Australian Labor Party has recklessly removed the cashless welfare card without providing alternatives, and I have said that in the media.

It is interesting that there was a letter written and sent on 21 March by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries to licensees; it has only just been sent. It is related to the emergency financial assistance debit card being provided to people for \$1 000 of government-issued Kimberley flood payment support in the form of a prepaid card. In that letter the director of Liquor Licensing, Lanie Chopping, says —

I kindly ask that you do not accept this card for the purchase of liquor and tobacco products.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

There are some concerns about the nature of this letter. I think there was an opportunity in this letter to provide a bit more advice on how that might be done and the legal ramifications of not accepting card for the purchase of those products. It seems to me that at one level the Labor Party is taking a philosophical position to the cashless welfare debit card without consideration of what happens on the ground, but it then turns around to the Western Australian branch of the Labor Party, the McGowan government, and sends this letter telling licensees, effectively retailers, not to accept a debit card for the purposes of purchasing liquor and tobacco. I think that letter would have been enhanced with some support about the implications if a proprietor or a retailer denied a service. The Indue card's use for the purposes of purchasing alcohol and tobacco was proscribed. I support the government's intent, but I condemn the hypocrisy on this issue, and I condemn the recklessness on the Labor Party for the removal of the card, and the direct impact of the terrible scourge of violence on people in those communities where the card has been removed must be owned by the Labor Party.

Tabling of Paper

Hon KYLE McGINN: Should the letter being referred to be tabled? He was referring to a letter and I ask for it to be tabled.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I have not given anybody the call. I do not think the member quoted from a document; I think he made reference to a letter. I might ask Hon Neil Thomson to clarify whether he quoted from a document, and then I will seek some further advice.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Deputy President —

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I am speaking. Deputy President, I am more than happy to provide the letter to Hansard for clarification. I quoted one line from the letter. I am more than happy to provide that letter for the purposes of Hansard with respect to the line I quoted to be recorded in *Hansard*.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Just a moment, members. Hon Kyle McGinn raised a point of order that I believe is pursuant to standing order 59(2), which says —

At the conclusion of a speech in which a Member has quoted from a document, the document shall be tabled upon the request of any other Member, unless the Member states the document is a confidential document.

Hon Neil Thomson has confirmed he did quote from a document. Can the honourable member confirm whether that document is confidential?

Hon NEIL THOMSON: The addressee and those aspects have been removed as are the contact details of Lanie Chopping, the director of Liquor Licensing, so I am more than happy to table the letter.

[See paper [2108](#).]