



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Australian Federal Police

SPEECH

Wednesday, 16 June 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Keenan, Michael, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (4.12 pm)—Right around the world Australia enjoys a reputation as being one of the safest, most secure places not only to live in but to visit, trade with and invest in. Here in Australia we are privileged to be protected by one of the finest federal police agencies in the world, the Australian Federal Police. It helps secure our borders and our cyberspace, protect our homes and protect our lives. Unfortunately this Labor government fails to acknowledge this. It fails to acknowledge the hard work the AFP does in keeping our community free from crime.

In order to talk about the AFP today it is important to acknowledge its beginnings. The Australian Federal Police began operations on 19 October 1979 under the Fraser Liberal government. The catalyst for its formation was the Sydney Hilton Hotel bombing the year before and a realisation by the Australian government that an organisation was needed to deal with issues such as terrorism on a national level. In 30 years the AFP has changed dramatically and doubled in size, now with more than 6,000 members. Its investigations encompass a variety of crimes, from child sex offences to tax evasion, drug smuggling and terrorism. Members work as general duties police in the ACT, uniformed police at Australia's major airports, detectives, liaison officers and in a variety of specialist fields.

Notably, the world security environment changed forever on September 11, 2001 after terrorists attacked New York City and Washington, DC. The attacks in Bali then made it clear to Australia that we could be the target of a major terrorist incident, something most Australians would previously have dismissed. In 2005, the London bombings were a devastating reminder to everybody that terrorism can be home-grown. With this in mind the former coalition government, in consultation with Australia's states and territories, passed antiterrorism laws in mid December 2005. These included amendments to Commonwealth legislation that enable Australia to better deter and prevent potential acts of terrorism at home, to prosecute them when they occur and to restrict the movement of those who pose a terrorist threat to our community. The coalition strongly supports the prevention of terrorist attacks in Australia, and Australian interests overseas should continue to be a high priority for the AFP.

In addition to having officers in every Australian capital and some regional centres, the AFP also has members working at 31 international posts and 11 overseas missions. As a national police agency the AFP is in a unique position to combat transnational crime as it straddles both national and international elements of law enforcement. It works closely with its partner agencies both in Australia and overseas to combat all forms of criminal activity. The AFP follows a multijurisdictional, multiagency approach that is essential to combating crime and to responding to emergency situations such as bushfires, tsunamis and other natural disasters. It is also involved with helping to develop law enforcement capabilities for police agencies in the Pacific region and farther afield through the International Deployment Group.

Another way the AFP is working in the international arena to combat drug trafficking is through the establishment of the transnational crime coordination centres in Asia and the Pacific. This network enables policing agencies to exchange information and intelligence and can lead to operational success in combating transnational crime syndicates. It also enables police to share new methodologies and techniques that improve the capability to combat criminal activity. The AFP's involvement in the centres enhances the work they are already doing through the International Deployment Group and the international liaison network to build policing capabilities within our region.

It is important to acknowledge that the AFP responds swiftly to requests for assistance from Asia-Pacific regional partners in areas that include disaster victim identification, crime scene forensics, post bomb blast investigation, financial investigation, intelligence and technical support. Examples of this assistance being provided include after the Bali bombings in 2002, the Jakarta embassy bombing and the Marriott Hotel bombing in 2005. The AFP deployed counterterrorism assets to Thailand to assist in the aftermath of the New Year's Eve 2006 bombings and more recently the AFP deployed an assessment team to Mumbai in response to the terrorist attacks in November 2008 to provide support for consular operations.

The Minister for Home Affairs mentioned in his statement that Labor will be reinvesting the \$23.5 million in savings identified by the Beale report into

staffing so that they can meet their 2007 election commitment for 500 extra sworn officers. As Senator Brandis discovered in Senate estimates in Budget Paper No. 2, it was claimed that the \$23.5 million in savings would be used for high-impact criminal investigations relating to transnational and domestic crime, counterterrorism, high-tech crime, fraud, money laundering, people smuggling, drug trafficking and child sex offences, not to meet a funding shortfall for Labor's election commitment.

What the government will not admit and what Commissioner Negus confirmed was that there was a shortfall in money that had been provided to get the 500 officers. In order for the Australian Federal Police to reach the target of 500 they are required to find an additional \$30 million. That \$30 million must be found elsewhere within the AFP budget. The government is cutting the \$23.5 million away from airport security through what are described as 'efficiencies' in order to fund a promise that was not being delivered on because, to use the words of Commissioner Negus, 'there was a shortfall of \$30 million'. It would also seem that the government will still have to find another \$6.5 million to meet the shortfall seeing as they were \$30 million short according to the commissioner. This is added to the \$191.9 million already allocated to deliver the additional sworn officers. The Minister for Home Affairs, not being transparent, neglected to mention that only \$36.7 million is due to be spent before the next election.

Another blight on the government's national security record is the fact that during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years there were approximately 200 voluntary redundancies in order for the AFP to attempt to meet a balanced budget as a result of an additional two per cent, one-off efficiency dividend and an ongoing 1.25 per cent efficiency dividend. Those redundancies largely consisted of experienced police officers and experienced Protective Service officers. The coalition understands that the burden of the so-called efficiency dividend can only be met by cutting back operations and reducing operational staff. The efficiency dividend is Labor's lazy way of making the books balance without putting in the hard work to find areas of waste and mismanagement, which have become the hallmark of this government.

What the minister has also left out are the broken promises Labor has failed to deliver on. In the 2007 election, Labor promised big yet has delivered small. On 5 October 2007, the then shadow minister for homeland security announced Labor's election commitment to create a brand new department of homeland security. As it was referred to by the shadow minister at the time, the department of homeland security was required because of the need to have all

non-military agencies involved in border security and counterterrorism work in the one department.

It will hardly come as a shock to those who have come to know the smoke and mirrors job this government is hiding behind that, in the Prime Minister's 2008 national security statement, he quietly dumped the promise of having a new department of homeland security. Yet the deception does not stop there. The then shadow minister for homeland security promised prior to the 2007 election that Labor would create a coastguard. The shadow minister said on 15 August of that year: 'Labor's coastguard will be equipped with new vessels and aircraft designed for their specific role. They will also be appropriately armed to undertake their important tasks. Additional personnel will be recruited to complement existing staff engagement in these tasks.'

In order to win elections, Labor will tell the public anything. This election promise to create a new coastguard was also dumped by the Prime Minister in December 2008. I also notice that, in the minister's statement, he seems to be claiming credit for the growth of the AFP not just over the last two-and-a-bit years but over the last decade. Surely, even the government would acknowledge the contribution the previous coalition government made to the growth of the AFP. I also note that the minister quoted the Prime Minister's first National Security Statement to parliament in 2008. The minister quoted the following:

Australia's security and law enforcement agencies are playing a critical role in protecting Australian citizens, both at home and abroad.

The opposition could not agree more. However, he neglected to mention that the government has, in this year's budget alone, axed one of the AFP offices in Jakarta. I also refer to the budget cuts and delayed staffing commitments. As with so many of their other commitments, the government has proved to be all talk and no action in delivering the means to keep our great country safe.

The minister also talked in his statement about the need for reform. Why, then, will he not talk about the need to reform our immigration and border protection policies? It is this government's failings in border protection that have led to a massive strain on the resources of the AFP. The coalition wholeheartedly supports the growth and development of our leading national crime-fighting agency but only when it is done in conjunction with the implementation of a tougher border protection regime. Spending more money will not solve the problem at hand, which is policy—bad policy—made here in Canberra.

For the last six years of the Howard government, there was an average of three illegal boat arrivals

per year. Since the Labor government dismantled the coalition government's tough and robust border protection system in August 2008, we have had an average of three illegal arrivals per week. Since August 2008, there have been 137 illegal boat arrivals carrying 6,425 people. This year alone there have been 69 illegal boat arrivals carrying 3,390 people. The rate of arrivals is literally overwhelming the available capacity of our border protection forces, who work incredibly hard to keep Australia safe.

The AFP's vast array of responsibilities seems to be ever increasing. The current areas of responsibility include aviation security; child protection operations; Commonwealth crime, such as people smuggling, drug importation and trafficking; e-crimes; crimes against the environment; counterfeit currency; policing of the Australian external territories; family law; fighting terrorism; fraud; human trafficking; international operations; intellectual property crime; and missing persons. What we have heard from the Minister for Home Affairs is that this government is adept at spin but very weak on action. It is a government that promises big but delivers small.

The coalition understands that the police forces of Australia are very important to the fabric of our society. They are the real front line when it comes to dealing with crime and protecting our community. Our police forces provide 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year service to our communities. This is not a regular nine-to-five job and it comes with unique challenges. The police are forced to deal with the situations that are placed in front of them. It is a job that places many stresses on the individuals who are involved. The operational nature of police work means that there are very real possibilities of physical injury, verbal abuse, attending fatal accidents or needing to use force to restrain offenders. Police, unlike any other workers, are compelled by an oath to stand in harm's way. The reality is the bulk of the good work that the AFP does goes unsung. Good news is rarely reported, but the AFP contributes to the high quality of life that we in Australia are able to enjoy. The police ensure our communities are safe and secure, thereby underpinning the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of Australia.

If Labor want to be taken seriously on national and domestic security, they must deliver on their election commitments in full and give the resources that are needed for the police forces to do their jobs effectively. The battle against crime is fought overseas in foreign lands, at our borders, on our streets and in our suburbs by AFP officers patrolling the front line. The Labor government asking them to do more with less is very dangerous. Australia's Federal Police are amongst the finest in the world. Without providing the support

they need, the Labor government risk alienating the hardworking men and women that make our Australian Federal Police world class.