

## **Protecting WA seniors** (Policy statement made by the WA Labor Party prior to the last election)

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Far too often older Western Australians are seen as easy targets. In fact, since 1992 reported offences against people aged 55 years and more has increased almost 145%.

This situation is intolerable.

Labor recognises that it is imperative that we act now to create a society where older Western Australians are - and feel - safe in their own homes and in the community.

It requires a comprehensive response from State government: tougher penalties, more police out on the beat and better policing strategies and increased support for dealing with the causes of crime. And the fact of an ageing population highlights the priority that must be given to the implementation of this response- Labor knows that by giving our seniors a fair go, we are building a better and safer community for Western Australians of all ages.

#### **Labor will:**

- introduce the Criminal Code (Protection of Vulnerable Persons) Amendment Bill as a matter of priority. This will increase maximum jail sentences in situations where the victim is aged 60 years or more or is suffering from a significant intellectual or physical disability:
  - for assault - from 5 to 10 years;
  - for robbery - from 14 years to 20 years; .
  - for burglary - from 18 years to 20 years; and
  - for fraud - from 7 years to 10 years;
- boost police numbers by 250 officers over four years with these extra officers being deployed throughout Western Australia; and to target known crime hotspots in particular;
- increase support for the Mounted Police and the Canine Section by \$1.4 million over four years, and encourage a more visible police presence in the suburbs and country towns;
- implement a \$52 million plan to make our trains safer by:
  - introducing a team of 50 Transit Police to patrol our metropolitan rail system;
  - establishing a 150 member Transit Guard Squad and returning to a policy of a fully trained guard on every train; and
  - developing a range of other initiatives to improve safety on trains and on the stations, including barrier entries at every new station added to the network. protecting WA seniors

### **PROTECTING WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SENIORS**

Since 1992 crimes against seniors have been on the rise.

Figures from the Crime Research Centre show that in 1992 there were a total of 409 reported offences against Western Australians aged 55 and above.

By 1999, this had more than doubled to 1001, a dramatic increase of almost 145%. In this same period the number of reported offences increased for all age groups but what is particularly shocking is the types of crimes being perpetrated against older Western Australians who are often the most vulnerable in our community.

Older people are seen as easy targets by some?

This exacerbates people's sense of fear, and insecurity about being attacked and becoming yet another victim of crime: in the streets, in shopping centres, on public transport and in other public places and increasingly in people's own homes.

With the ageing of our population, it is imperative that government acts now to create a society where older Western Australians are - and feel - safe.

By 2020, it is estimated that one quarter of Western Australia's population will be aged 60 years and over. In fact it will be the first time when there will be more people aged more than 60 than those aged under 18.

Protecting our seniors and tackling crime demands a comprehensive response from State Government: ranging from tougher penalties^ more police on the beat and better policing strategies to supporting innovative crime prevention initiatives that get to the root of the causes of crime.

Labor knows that by giving older Western Australian a fair go, we are building a better community for people of all ages.

### **TOUGHER PENALTIES**

As a result of mounting public concern about vicious criminal attacks against older Western Australians, Labor introduced its Criminal Code (Protection of Seniors) Amendment Bill into State Parliament in September 2000.

The Bill specifically recognised that older people are often the most vulnerable in our society and that the public demands that the penalties for offences against older people matches its outrage over the horrifying nature of such offences.

Criminals who prey on older Western Australians would be left in no doubt that they would face longer jail sentences for such crimes. protecting WA seniors

And under Labor's Bill, there would be longer jail sentences for those who have been convicted of the white-collar crime of fraud.

Labor does not accept that such crimes are 'victimless'. The recent finance brokers scandal has highlighted the devastation wreaked on senior citizens who entrusted their life savings to supposedly regulated finance brokers for investment to secure the rest of their lives, only to find it all disappear.

The Bill would increase the maximum jail sentences in situations where the victim is aged 60 years or more:

- for assault -from 5 to 10 years;
- for robbery - from 14 years to 20 years;
- for burglary-from 18 years to 20 years; and
- for fraud - from 7 years to 10 years.

Despite the fact that this Bill provided a prime opportunity for all of Parliament to send a clear message that older Western Australians are valued and respected members of our community worthy of the greatest protection the State's laws can provide, the Court Government refused outright to support Labor's initiative.

Yet it is dear from the public discussion surrounding Labor's Bill that there is significant support for the protection it would provide to Western Australian seniors.

In fact, there is strong public support for going further in the legislation to punish those who have taken criminal advantage of any person suffering from a significant intellectual or physical disability.

Labor recognises the public's support for strong and effective legislation that protects all Western Australians who are more vulnerable through age or because of the nature of the person's disability.

In Government, Labor will introduce legislation to protect seniors as well as people with an intellectual or physical disability by increasing the penalties for the offences of assault, robbery, burglary and fraud in line with Labor's original Bill.

In Government, Labor will:

- introduce a Criminal Code (Protection of Vulnerable Persons) Amendment Bill as a matter of priority.

## **BEING SAFER OUT IN THE COMMUNITY**

### **More police on the beat**

Labor knows that an increased police presence on the streets has a significant impact on reducing crime.

The public feels safer; the public is safer.

This is particularly important for older Western Australians who are often more vulnerable to crime and anti-social activity,

### **A Gallop Labor Government will:**

- boost police numbers by 250 officers over 4 years.

These extra 250 officers will be deployed throughout WA, and be specifically targeted at known crime hot spots, and in a rapid deployment capacity.

Labor recognises that there are police stations in suburbs and towns throughout Western Australia suffering from chronic under-staffing to the extent that police capacity to deal with local crime problems is put at risk.

Labor will ensure that the extra officers are deployed in areas that are experiencing higher crime rates and therefore have the greatest need for an expanded police presence.

Under Labor there will be more officers out on the beat when they are most needed.

### **More visible policing**

As part of bolstering the 'thin blue line' and putting more police on the beat Labor wants a more visible police presence in the suburbs and in country towns.

In this age of increasingly more sophisticated technology, some of the tried and true methods of policing such as mounted police are being overlooked, often for more expensive yet sometimes less effective remedies.

Figures from the Police Service show that mounted horse patrols are successful in reducing crime in some areas by 50%. Mounted patrols are a proven deterrent against crime and can bolster people's sense of safety and security in a very positive way.

Labor also applauds the volunteer spirit shown by many in the equestrian community who put their time and effort in helping police searches and other emergencies.

Labor wants to see more mounted patrols out on the streets and in our communities and will be providing extra funding to achieve this.

**Labor will:**

- work with the Commissioner of Police to ensure additional police officers are allocated to the Mounted and Canine Sections. These officers would be deployed out of the extra 250 officers that Labor has already committed to;
- ensure that as part of our support for this commitment, an additional \$400,000 over four years will be provided to boost these Sections' operating budgets for general purpose expenses, such as buying and training more animals, agistment and farrier and vet fees. This is an approximately 30 percent increase in the current allowances made;
- allocate \$1 million in capital works funding to support the expansion of facilities of the Mounted Section to outer metropolitan and major regional centres. Labor will ensure that these developments are undertaken in consultation with local authorities; and
- ensure that the Mounted Section is used mainly for patrol and policing duties, with less focus on ceremonial duties.

Further details about Labor's Police policies will be released in the near future.

**MAKING OUR TRAINS SAFER**

Labor believes that older Western Australians - indeed the whole community - has the right to use our trains, buses and ferries without fear of violence and intimidation.

This is especially important for older Western Australians who may have no option but to use public transport. If people are too scared to catch a train or a bus on their own or at night they can end up being virtual prisoners in their own homes.

It is a sad fact that Western Australians are becoming increasingly worried about their safety when travelling on public transport, particularly trains.

The Court Government's own Attitude Monitoring Survey shows Western Australians are becoming more reluctant to travel by train, not only at night but also during the day.

Between 1996 and 1999, the percentage of people who said they felt safe or quite safe using public transport plummeted from 55 per cent to 46 percent.

Another survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that, out of all the States in Australia, Western Australians are the most worried with respect to safety on public transport.

The percentage of people who feel safe or very safe travelling on public transport after dark was only 16 per cent compared to a national rate of 22 per cent.

Significantly, the percentage of people who felt unsafe or very unsafe was 44 per cent compared to the national average of 39 per cent.

These figures show that the Court Government's strategies over the last eight years to deal with safety on our trains are not working.

Labor is committed to improving train security.

This is an essential part of Labor's long term and demonstrated commitment to public transport and to creating safer communities. "

As part of Labor's \$52 million plan to make our trains safer. Labor will:

- introduce a team of 50 Transit Police to patrol our metropolitan rail system;

and

- return to having a fully trained guard on every train, by establishing a 150- member Transit Guard squad.

### **Transit Police**

As part of Labor's commitment to boosting police numbers by 250 officers, Labor will introduce a team of 50 Transit Police to patrol the metropolitan rail system.

These 50 Transit Police will be fully sworn regular police officers who will work in uniform and undercover on the trains and at train stations. They will work with the Transit Guards to ensure that commuters are not subject to violence and intimidation.

The Transit Police will work mainly in the evening and at night when public confidence in using our train system is at its lowest ebb.

### **Transit Guards**

Labor will also return to the policy of having a fully trained guard on every train.

To achieve this we will establish a 150 member Transit Guard Squad to patrol the metropolitan rail system.

All night trains will have at least 2 security personnel - usually one Transit Guard and one Transit Police officer.

Transit Guards will be Westrail officers who will be comprehensively trained to provide three important functions.

Firstly, to increase security.

Transit Guards will have the current powers of Westrail and Chubb security guards and will be able to remove people from trains.

Secondly, to check fares.

A key role of Transit Guards will be to patrol the train to check that passengers have bought the right tickets. Fare evasion has become a significant problem on our trains, costing Western Australian taxpayers millions of dollars in lost revenue each year.

Thirdly, to enhance customer service.

Transit Guards will be able to assist passengers on trains who are having difficulties, such as the elderly, people with a disability and parents or carers with young children.

Labor will utilise the additional \$17.6 million provided in the Government Mid-Year Review on capital works initiatives to improve the train system and make it safer including:

- barrier entries at every new station added to the network; for example the new South West Metropolitan railway, the extension to Clarkson and any other new or replacement station on existing lines;
- an assessment of the feasibility of placing ticket machines on trains where there are no barrier restrictions;
- Smart Card ticketing to maximise the ease of purchasing tickets. Ticket machines will be upgraded to accept notes and issue all tickets, including MultiRiders;
- the expansion of monitored video surveillance; and
- the introduction of "help buttons" at stations.

## **W.A. Labor Government Policy**

Website: [www.ministers.wa.gov.au/policies/seniors.pdf](http://www.ministers.wa.gov.au/policies/seniors.pdf)

### **Valuing Our Seniors**

#### **Finance Brokers.**

The finance brokers scandal that has unfolded in Western Australia over the last year has ruined the lives of many elderly people.

An estimated 7000 people are believed to have lost money-if not their entire retirement savings- as a result of the immoral or criminal activity in the finance broking industry.

Indeed, conservative estimates put the total losses across the State at \$100 million. Others estimate the losses could be as much as \$200 million.

Fraud of elderly investors, who have reached the end of their income earnings lives, is devastating.

In Government, Labor will implement a five-point plan to comprehensively deal with the many issues, which have arisen in this terrible scandal and have been neglected by the Court Government so far.

1. Ascertain the facts;  
A judicial inquiry will be established to ascertain all the truth about what went wrong in the finance broking industry.
2. Legal assistance;  
The State will fund legal action in appropriate cases to recover losses from finance brokers, company directors, valuers, banks, auditors, accountants, lawyers and anyone else responsible for the losses.
3. Full disclosure;  
All government knowledge about the finance broking industry, including legal opinions and results of audits and investigations, will be open to the public.

4. Facilitate court action to resolve liability;  
A Labor Government will act decisively to bring the legal issues arising from the finance broking scandal to an early resolution in the courts.
5. Pay up where liability is established;  
The combination of openness and legal assistance should help in the early resolution of questions of liability. In the State is held responsible, appropriate action will be taken by a Labor Government to both compensate investors and pursue recovery from the wrong doers.