

Vanessa Goodwin MLC

Shadow Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Monday 14 December 2009

Risdon Prison, Gottawanna

Please note this transcript is not formally proofed.

Journalist:

Can you tell us what you know about this incident at Risdon Prison yesterday afternoon please?

Vanessa Goodwin:

I don't know really very much at all other than there has been an incident at Risdon Prison. Two Prison Officers have been hospitalised and obviously that is a course of concern and as to what is underlying the latest violence in Risdon Prison, I don't know the facts.

Journalist:

Unions are calling for a review of safety out there. They are concerned that the Members are being attacked while on the job? What's your reaction to that?

Vanessa Goodwin:

Well I think Prison Officers play an important role in the Prison, and it is quite a dangerous job. We have some very serious offenders in Risdon Prison, and obviously if there are some safety concerns, they need to be addressed.

Journalist:

Do you think budgetary concerns could be a problem out there? There's talk there has been limitation put on overtime and sick leave and that sort of thing?

Vanessa Goodwin:

Look, it's possible that the budgetary concerns may be the issue. It may be issues with the way prisoners are treated and whether their concerns are being listened to or not being listened to. It's really hard to speculate when we don't know the

true facts and we really need to wait and see what the facts are before we draw too many conclusions.

Journalist:

What do you think of the Government calling those involved thugs?

Vanessa Goodwin:

Well, obviously violence can't be tolerated whether it's inside or outside the prison. I think that is fairly clear and we need to condemn the actions of people who resort to violence to get their point across, but at the same time we need to establish what is underlying this latest bout of violence and try and ensure that it doesn't happen again, because we can't continue to place Prison Officers at risk.

Journalist:

Is this part of the problem that the Government hasn't really revealed much information about what's gone there? Are you concerned about that?

Vanessa Goodwin:

I think it is difficult because the police investigation is obviously underway and more matters will come to light as that progresses, but certainly members of the community are interested in what is happening out at Risdon Prison. The families of prisoners would be concerned about their welfare and obviously are concerned about the welfare of the Prison Officers who have been attacked.

Journalist:

Are you aware of double bunking in the maximum security facility?

Vanessa Goodwin:

I haven't heard of any problems with overcrowding in the prison, but the prison male prisoner population or the imprisonment rate has increased by about 41% over the last ten years, and that is a significant increase and I think a cause for concern and obviously if you do have an issue with overcrowding in a prison, then that can increase the safety risk.

Journalist:

How would you label the Government's handling of the Corrections in Tasmania?

Vanessa Goodwin:

I think there is room for significant improvement. One of the concerns I have is that we have had such a significant increase in the imprisonment rate. We don't appear to have the resources in the community so that we can have more offenders serving time on community based orders, and I think we don't have enough resources for programs, like the Gottawanna Program for example run by Holyoake, which looks like it's set to close, and that's about addressing people

drug and alcohol issues and any other addictions they have. So that's a concern, that I have, we don't have the resources in the community, so we have to send people to prison and that's not the best option in rehabilitation.

Journalist:

Are you worried, I guess about Risdon's reputation? It's had a bit of a history of these kind of events. Are you worried about how that looks?

Vanessa Goodwin:

Yes, certainly it is a concern. There have been some incidents over the years at Risdon Prison. It is a maximum security prison, and we do have some serious offenders housed in Risdon Prison, so obviously we need to bare that in mind, but we have to do obviously everything that we can to make sure the prison is safe from the Correctional Officers point of view and recognising the important roles that they play.

For further information or comment please call Brad Stansfield – 0419 884 666