Cop debate spills over to TBL policies join parties' staff level row

Jim Robertson

The debate that continues to rage between the major parties over Territory police numbers has now expanded to include the police presence at bottle-shops.

Chief Minister Adam Giles attacked Labor’s policy to remove police from bottle-shops in regional areas of the Northern Territory as one that would see an increase in alcohol-fueled violence and crime.

The statement followed comments made by Shadow Minister for Alcohol Policy Natasha Fyles on Darwin radio this week.

“Under Labor, temporary beat locations (TBLs) will only operate at times of ‘heightened activity’ such as the football and major events,” Ms Fyles said.

“We won’t see highly trained police officers standing around for days, weeks and months in front of bottleshops,” she said.

The back-and-forth continued when Territory Labor leader Michael Gunner claimed the CLP had failed to deliver on a promised 120 extra police officers.

The CLP had failed to deliver on a promised 120 extra police officers and to employ all 94 of the Metropolitan Patrol Group. According to Labor, a recent set of estimates committee data found since 2011/12 and until the end of March 2016 there were just 27 additional police in the NT.

The estimates data states that Full Time Equivalent (FTE) police figures were 1401 as of March 31, 2016, compared with a 2011/12 FTE figure of 1374.

NT Police Association president Paul McCue backed up the figure.

“These are FTE figures so we’re talking apples and apples and from our point of view there are only 26 or 27 extra police up to March this year,” Mr McCue said.

In response, but without a direct reference to current police numbers, Mr Giles doubled down on the CLP’s original promise of more recruits.

“A re-elected Country Liberal Government will employ 105 additional police auxiliary officers to enhance community safety, including attendance at bottle-shops, with powers to search and arrest,” Mr Giles said.

“The police association asked us to find an alternative model and we’ve delivered. It’s estimated this will see up to 70 frontline officers redirected to other duties.”

Not unexpectedly, the Opposition leader disagreed.

“The official data speaks for itself – Adam Giles and the CLP can’t be trusted on police figures and they can’t be trusted to keep their election promises,” Mr Gunner said.

“Given Adam Giles’ absolute failure on these promises, it’s clear he will fail to deliver on the 105 second-tier police.”

According to Mr Gunner, an elected Labor government would “deliver the additional 120 police, properly resource police so they have the tools to do their jobs and keep the community safe and bring back the banned drinkers register, which police said was the best tool they had to tackle alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and crime.”

Mr Giles took issue, stating the Country Liberals were “proud” that TBLs had succeeded in reducing problems with anti-social behaviour.

“They (Labor’s) approach is a backward step which will have awful consequences for families and public safety in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine,” he said.

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