

DOWNLOAD THE mySA GOV APP



Mark Carroll: SA Parliament has abandoned injured and suffering police who risked all to keep us safe

IF a police officer challenged a drug-affected gunman roaming your neighbourhood, you'd be pretty grateful. And your gratitude would be justified because what other stranger, besides a copper, would elevate your physical safety above his or her own?

MARK CARROLL

November 5, 2015 - 9:52PM The Advertiser

0 comments

Warren Brown's cartoon of a police car chasing a gun driven by a rat giving the cops the finger.

If a police officer challenged a drug-affected gunman roaming your neighbourhood, you'd be pretty grateful.

And your gratitude would be justified, because what other stranger, besides a copper, would elevate your physical safety above his or her own? Probably no one.

The problem is that while police willingly accept their duty to prioritise public welfare above their own, they often suffer serious bodily injuries in the process.

And I think of cops such as Senior Constable Brett Gibbons, who suffered a horrific shotgun blast to his face at the scene of the Hectorville triple murder in 2011.

Before that there was Senior Constable Alison Coad, who contracted painful oral herpes after a violent female offender spat directly into her mouth in 2003.

And while Gumeracha Senior Constable Brian Edwards tried to — and did — protect his community against leaking anhydrous ammonia last February, he was the one who ended up with burnt lungs.

Brian now struggles with his breathing. Brett has undergone four operations since he was shot, and will need more. Alison suffers outbreaks of lesions on her hard palate every six to eight weeks and will for life.

These officers would much prefer these incidents had never happened, but they never whinge about the fact that they did. They think of them simply as part of the job.

What has sparked their ire, however, is the Weatherill Government's new return-to-work legislation, which effectively penalises rather than supports injured police.

FROM OUR PARTNERS

Watch The Third Day - A new HBO limited series **Stream it on Foxtel Now**

The Return to Work Act, which kicked in on July 1 this year, imposes strict new caps on compensation payments for suffering workers such as Brian, Brett and Alison.

A two-year cap now applies to income maintenance and a three-year cap to medical expenses. After that, our selfless injured police will be on their own, footing medical bills themselves.

The only way an injured copper can get any financial compensation beyond those cut-offs is if he or she has been determined to have a 30 per cent "whole-person impairment". The Act defines that as a "seriously injured worker".

But what is clear on reading the Act is that it reflects a total lack of understanding of the profession. It doesn't even attempt to deliver support for psychological injury.

As for physical suffering, Brett Gibbons, with all his injuries and future medical needs, won't necessarily be determined to be 30 per cent impaired. And his future medical costs could rise into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Alison Coad will never be free of the oral herpes she contracted. She'll need medication for life and, from 2018, will have to pay for it herself.

And what if Brian Edwards ends up with a lung disease such as emphysema? He could well have to pay for his own medication and items such as an oxygen tank.

So, despite all our injured police officers have risked and suffered to keep the rest of us safe, the SA Parliament has seen fit to abandon them. Passing the legislation that brought this return-to-work regimen into being was a gross error.

Family First MLC Robert Brokenshire agrees. He calls the legislation "draconian, detrimental and unfair", and insists Parliament got it wrong. But that same Parliament can correct its error by endorsing new legislation.

Mr Brokenshire, with the support of his party, has tabled the Police (Return to Work) Amendment Bill in the Upper House. It seeks to amend the Police Act in a way that restores the benefits injured police were entitled to under the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act.

Passing this Bill is critical — and not just because it will deliver a fair outcome for deserving police. The entire community stands to gain from the confidence it will give frontline police in their decision-making. No one would want to see police officers hesitating to respond to incidents because they feared on-duty injuries could ruin them.

Police are relying on the public to encourage their local members to pass the Bill .



Join the conversation (0 comments)

More related stories



Reader letters: World War II POWs — we remember them
August 15: Readers have their say on Victory in the Pacific Day and a Melbourne traveller saying you can "basically do whatever you like over here" when it comes to social distancing.

4



Silly COVID restrictions need to go now
Despite SA's coronavirus "cluster" passing, we're still not allowed to stand at the pub or have more than 10 people at home. These restrictions are needlessly hurting businesses and families, writes Caleb Bond.

88

Good Morning M Recommended based on what you've read



Second body found at popular beach



'Tragic' accident leaves man critical



Roof collapses with 400 inside



AMAZON AUSTRALIA'S COVID SAFE CHRISTMAS
SPONSORED

Trending now

Sport
Bay Sheffield sprint carnival live stream Advertiser



Sport
Boxing Day Test scores, highlights: Day three live blog, lat...



News
Nashville explosion: Bomber died in blast with link to myste...



Coronavirus
Coronavirus Australia updates: Five new NSW cases as NYE rul...



News
Pauline Hanson calls for Family Court judges to lose holiday...



Most commented

Council frustrates push to remove 'extremely dangerous' tree
111

UK COVID strain found in Adelaide medi-hotel patient
96

'Disrespected' SES volunteers fear for safety on virus frontline
73

How did SA's Liberal pollies score in 2020?
44

Hot cross bun war: Who eats the most in SA
32

