OPINION

WITH **TOM PERCY**

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Pollies, step down

YOU MAY NOT HAVE noticed it, but crime in WA is on the way down. Well, that's what the Government says, so it must be true. "Reported" crime was down, because of their raft of "tough new laws" and that they were taking full credit or it.

I'm not exactly sure how the concept of "reported crime" relates to actual convictions in the courts, but there is one thing we do know for certain – any slowing of the rate of offending is not attributable to any policy or legislation introduced by the present government.

Any decline in the rate of offending is invariably a very slow process, affected by a variety of factors.

Over the past decade the courts have slowly been implementing a number of positive measures.

Increasing use of suspended sentences has been successful in ensuring that offenders, particularly young ones, don't become part of the criminal community and part of an ongoing recidivism problem.

The increased availability of violence restraining orders has also been a factor in reducing the potential for offending.

The continued acknowledgment by the courts that imprisonment is almost invariably counterproductive and should always be a last resort has seen rates of incarceration ameliorated from what they might otherwise have become.

The use of specially designated drug courts has helped break the cycle of addict offenders by a remedial rather than a punitive approach to the problem, keeping many of them out of the jail system and dramatically reducing the risk of reoffending.

Other initiatives such as neighbourhood watch programs, increased private video surveillance, improved police technology and promotion of anonymous phone-in facilities (Crime Stoppers) have also slowly eroded the potential for criminals to succeed.

The one thing that has not worked is the implementation of tougher penalties, the one thing for which the government now perversely wants to take credit. The harshest penalties we have in WA are in the areas of drug law (particularly confiscation) and hoon (traffic) laws. Ironically, some years after the implementation of these laws, these offences are still out of control.

Like other social problems we have sought to address over the past few decades (such as smoking or poor diet), you don't change habits and attitudes overnight by advertising campaigns or new legislation.

Those measures may help but the process is an incremental one, which takes years before you see any real result.

Crime rates are generally down, it's true. But the politicians can take little or no credit for any recent reduction in offending. It has occurred not because of them but despite them. STM

Tom Percy can be heard on 6PR 882 at 7.30am on Thursdays.

YOUR SAY WA

Do you agree with Tom?

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LETTERS

What possessed Nat Locke to target 25-year-olds named Jarrad in "Make my day, Mum" (Aug 8). My parents and younger sister took delight in waving STM in my face and teasing me endlessly about not doing my own washing when I visited them for dinner. (For the record, I do change my own bedsheets and make the bed every morning.) I would like to suggest the name Sheridan and the age 19 if Nat ever writes an article on girls who binge-drink or act like bogans in general. I'm always in need of ammunition against my younger sister.

JARRAD BRAYSHAW, VIA EMAIL

I had four children, two of each, and in the '70s I taught them the art of domestic chores, including the basics of sewing on a button and repairing a simple tear. At the time I was often questioned and/or ridiculed for teaching the boys. As life's challenges have evolved, these early lessons have been invaluable to all four of my children.

JANET BURGIN, BUNBURY

I don't think there would be one person in the world not inspired by Marty Mayberry's incredibly uplifting story (First person, Aug 1). My 17-year-old told me that a motivational speaker recently gave a talk at his school and that he wished he had had more talks like them when he was in prep school and was more impressionable.

DEBBIE, THE VINES

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