



"Waitakere Already has its own Guardian Angels - It's about Whanau"

Monday 16 January 2006

Dr Pita Sharples, Member of Parliament for Tamaki Makaurau, today spoke out about the American initiative being promoted for Waitakere City, by Canadian 'crime-fighter', Andy Cawston.

"While it is always interesting to look elsewhere at the ideas from overseas, I believe our best solutions start at home" stated Dr Sharples. "New Zealand already has volunteering policing through the Maori Warden System".

"We must not overlook the huge work undertaken by the Waitakere Maori wardens who have been working on a voluntary basis, for more years than I care to remember, to keep our streets safe".

"For the Maori wardens, it has been about manaakitanga, caring for the people, often with little resources. We have seen them breaking up fights, picking up truants and taking them back to school, even keeping the peace by patrolling the Western and Southern Line trains". [The Maori wardens have been working with Connex since July 2004 to prevent vandalism, graffiti, trespassing, rail abuse as well as stone throwing and substance abuse].

"The wardens play a very positive role in policing our communities. Their role is as mediators and facilitators - helping whanau to help themselves. This is a huge difference to the picture I get of the Guardian Angels - who are modelled on the concept of security guards, or vigilante citizen police".

"To hear Guardian Angels refer to their martial arts skills on television certainly does not engender me with confidence about their mediation and facilitation skills - unlike the Maori Wardens. I am pleased the NZ Police are 'luke warm' in their response to the guardian angels."

"What we should be putting energy into is in families taking responsibility for their own members. Increasing the powers of vigilante groups to exercise police control by proxy will not turn our communities around" stated Dr Sharples.

"The answers lie here in our own homes, investing in our own families, to take responsibility for each other. We do not need a Guardian Angel from New York to do that for us".

"I believe that it is time now to really focus on families. It is time that the older brothers and sisters, the uncles and aunties, and parents and grandparents stood up to be counted in the control of their own family members, if they are causing social disruption".

"Whether it is boy-racers, kids hanging at the mall, taggers, we seem to be stuck on the punitive line, where for instance, two new bills introduced in the House last year, call for new police powers to maintain community order and control in Manukau City. Perhaps it is time, instead, for New Zealand to rethink about the solidarity of our families, and to look at the role of the extended family as a pertinent and relevant unit in our society".

"I believe it is also time for our Government to be creative in the dispersement of social services funding and to look for opportunities to be supportive of the family unit, rather than to be spending millions on a whole lot of ad hoc, reactive pilots to stamp out youth offending".

ENDS

