



BUDGET 2007 - media releases

18 June 2007

Crisis developing in emergency response

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said Labor cuts to hospital and health services in country South Australia are building to a crisis in responding to emergency calls from accident scenes and now from the smaller hospitals to the designated regional hospitals at Port Lincoln and Whyalla.

The position will be exacerbated by the loss of 25% of rural doctors that is expected in the next five years as revealed in a recent statewide survey. Wudinna on Highway One is currently without a doctor with the nearest at Kimba over 100km away only has one. Port Lincoln the nearest regional hospital is 214km away.

Mrs Penfold said only Port Lincoln and Ceduna ambulances have paid staff, with the one paid person at Ceduna being there to assist volunteers, while all other services are fully manned by volunteers.

“The time has come for at least one paid officer to be attached to all small hospitals to assist volunteer ambulance crews and where there is no doctor available in towns like Wudinna, a fully paid service is needed to ensure retrievals and transfers take the least possible time.

“Currently most towns are serviced only by volunteers who have to manage their training and paper work as well as attend to call-outs and increased transfers between hospitals in addition to their employment,” she said.

“The load on these volunteers who are often volunteers in clubs, schools and hospitals as well is just getting too great.”

Mrs Penfold said paid ambulance officers must be combined with helicopter retrievals to the regional hospitals of Port Lincoln and Whyalla as well as Adelaide.

“These retrievals to the regional hospitals by ambulance or air ambulance are now a necessity for Eyre Peninsula if we are to retain the confidence of people living in our regional areas,” she said.

Mrs Penfold said helicopters are more versatile than fixed wing aircraft and are funded from the emergency services levy. Eyre Peninsula’s hospitals currently fund the air retrievals to Adelaide by the Royal Flying Doctor Service from their budgets.

“Adelaide RFDS retrievals are a huge and unknown cost that impacts on other services provided by our hospitals, and the cost must be expected to rise with the withdrawal of services and loss of doctors from smaller hospitals,” she said.

An upgrade of ambulance services announced in the budget will see only \$2.26 million in capital expenditure this year across the state in a program funded from the Country Capital Reserves Fund, despite the reduction in funding for services and administration forcing more patient transfers.

Country Children’s health at risk under Labor

The 2007 Labor state budget has heightened the health risks for rural students in South Australia to an unprecedented level, Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said.

She said the government's stingy removal of funding for first aid training and making it non compulsory for teachers and staff in public schools, when added to reductions in health services in country hospitals and towns, makes any school accident potentially life-threatening. It may even make school camps a thing of the past particularly now the cost and responsibility is also being thrown back on the schools to pay for workcover. Even if they can afford them, will they take the risk?

As part of the funding cuts to public education, the government has stopped the funding of first aid training which, if it is continued, will come from school budgets thus reducing funds available for other school commitments.

"Miltaburra and Karcultaby are schools in paddocks with not even a volunteer ambulance service close by.

"Recognising the risk, principals and governing councils are funding the first aid training for their teachers at the expense of other school commitments.

"I believe this shortsighted decision will compound the risk of a disaster in a medical crisis, particularly in these and other small schools across the state, or reduce school options for students.

"Why should there have to be a choice between safety and curriculum in our small remote schools?

"Do we have to wait for the first death for this city-based government to acknowledge the health risks inherent in our isolated communities?" she asked.

Are hospitals "Going, going, gone" under Labor?

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said the \$35 million cut to services and administration in regional health this year alone puts a question mark over the continuation of small country hospitals.

"The cuts are only one of the new funding 'arrangements' put in place by Labor.

"The regional hospitals of Port Lincoln and Whyalla are expected to pay for a proposed increase in specialist visits and services.

"While I welcome the possibility of more specialists coming to the regions, thus saving patients the huge cost in time, money and stress of having to go to the city, it doesn't take an Einstein to figure that small country hospitals will be further strapped for funding as the regional hospitals struggle to cope with the extra financial load and reduced budget put upon them," she said.

Mrs Penfold said the current funding cuts appear to be the next step in Labor's long-term plan for the state to opt out of small regional hospitals.

She suggested that starving small hospitals of funding could be part of a Labor move to downgrade them to federally funded nursing homes.

"In 2002, I asked the state Minister for Health for an assurance that acute care services would continue in all Eyre Peninsula hospitals and she replied that there was no intention to make any changes to acute care services in the ten hospitals.

"However the Minister, when questioned in 2004 about the same matter along with the reinstatement of obstetrics and surgery where these had been lost, refused to affirm her previous undertaking," she said.

Mrs Penfold said that the Minister, on radio, said 'it was nonsense to assert that the only thing that a hospital can do is acute care; that view went out decades ago.'

"As I observed three years ago, Labor does not care about the people who live in rural and regional South Australia and who generate the wealth that provides the quality of life that all South Australians enjoy," Mrs Penfold said.

(Education / Hospitals & Health / Airport)
12 June 2007

Labor guts public school funding

The 2007 Rann State Budget does nothing for schools, staff and students on Eyre Peninsula. Instead, the closure of small schools like Wharminda Primary School, are on the government's agenda.

Education cuts by the Labor state government are so severe that they will impact on children's education in all public schools, Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said.

"Assurances from the Minister for Education Jane Lomax-Smith that "changes to practices" by rearranging funding is an attempt to blind the public," she said.

The budget requires schools to "save" \$38 million across 600 schools which equates to an average of about \$50,000 a site, depending on the size of the school.

Schools in the Flinders Electorate are already counting the cost to school communities to take into account the additional burdens being imposed on them.

One school estimates it faces cuts to their budget of \$75,000 or more, which is about 150% of the funds available for curriculum, and school administration. Costs include

- WorkCover Levy (previously paid by the Department) \$28,000.
- Reduction in the amount of interest on "investments" (mostly funds paid by parents at the beginning of the year) up to \$20,000.
- Cuts to grants for power and water based on a percentage reduction from 2001 usage – actual amount unsure but likely to be about \$3000.
- New impost of \$1000 pa to upgrade EDSAS, the data base that the department requires schools to keep.
- Increased internet costs, probably about \$1000.
- Increased payment for temporarily placed teachers and support staff who do not hold a position in the school but who are placed there by DECS; currently around \$21,000, but building to \$43,000, with likely increases over and above that.

These cuts equate to an increase in fees of about \$220 per student for a school with approximately 340 students, or alternatively an equally severe reduction in services.

Aquatics Program subsidies are also under review with the possibility that these school programs are also under threat.

Mrs Penfold said schools will not be given extra funding to cover any of these costs.

“But it doesn’t stop there.

“In a cruel twist budget announcements coincide with advice that First Aid training for teachers is no longer compulsory and will no longer be funded by the department.

“Once again the impact on rural schools is much more dramatic. Often medical help is too far away and schools have to determine if they are prepared to take the risk of having inadequately trained staff on site.

A rally has been arranged by the South Australian Association of State School Organisation and Mrs Penfold urged anyone in Adelaide on Thursday 14th June to attend the rally at 4.30 pm on the steps of Parliament House to protest the government’s gutting of public education.

The teachers union and the principals’ association who have urged staff and parents to support the protest rally.

“I believe that this is only the second time that this united action has occurred which demonstrates the major negative impact that these budget cuts will have on all our children in state schools,” Mrs Penfold said. ENDS

Rural health and hospitals crippled

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said that cuts to regional health services in the state budget, added to funding reductions during the Labor state government’s term of office, will cripple health delivery in the country.

The budget requires \$30 million ‘savings’ to be made by regional health services and a further \$5 million by administration over four years.

“This huge cut in country health funding will mean further down-grading of acute emergency care in the smaller regional hospitals across the state including eight located on Eyre Peninsula in addition to Port Lincoln and Ceduna.

“The crippling of our country health services will further erode the ability to attract doctors,” Mrs Penfold said.

She said that more lives are saved in the ‘golden hour’ (the first hour after an accident or health crisis) than any time later.

She said we must fight to save the ‘golden hour’ across our regions or more people will die unnecessarily.

“Our region is crossed by national highways and alternate highways travelled by thousands of people every day.

“We need to travel on the roads more often and for longer periods than city people, and our farming population is ageing.

“Hospitals are more than one hour from the designated regional hospitals of Port Lincoln and Whyalla.

“These districts also have no taxis, buses or paid ambulance staff, nor often the means to readily communicate with them,” she said.

Mrs Penfold calls on the state Health Minister John Hill to guarantee that all patients will have access to emergency treatment within the ‘golden hour’.

“Under Labor, our country regions are returning to the era when John Flynn conceived the necessity for the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver health and medical care,” she said. ENDS

Capital works or capital delusion

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said the budget's only big announcement for capital works in the whole of regional South Australia is \$35 million for the redevelopment of the Ceduna Health Service.

"But even this is not scheduled to begin until 2009 and to be completed in 2012," she said.

Mrs Penfold said she is delighted that the redevelopment is on the agenda in the next five years as parts of the buildings are extremely old and inefficient for the delivery of modern health practices.

"However, since the start date is two years into the future, I am concerned that this redevelopment will go the way of so many of Labor's announcements and disappear," she said.

The upgrading of the Ceduna Area School, originally announced by a Liberal government in 2001 then again by Labor for completion in 2006, also became a concern as Labor cut, pasted and dodged responsibility and is only completing a modified plan under this 2007-08 budget.

Mrs Penfold cited the desalination plant for the Tod reticulation system that was "written in blood" in 2002, and the Port Lincoln Primary and Junior Primary Schools' problems which were going to be addressed as a matter of urgency also in 2002 but which are still waiting for action.

"I am pleased that the Ceduna hospital has been put on the agenda however it remains to be seen whether this capital work will go ahead as announced or whether it will become yet another capital delusion by Labor," Mrs Penfold said. ENDS

Port Lincoln Airport Funding Has Flown.

The \$4 million announced by the Premier in 2005 to help the District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula Council upgrade the Port Lincoln airport is nowhere to be seen in the 2007/08 Budget.

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said "Port Lincoln is the busiest airport outside of Adelaide with over 140,000 passengers per year and "you still cannot buy a cup of coffee on site".

"On King Island with around 10,000 passengers per year you can buy coffee, a snack, newspapers and local produce," she said.

She said the Premier's announcement two years ago recognised that the LEP Council did not have the financial resources to further develop the airport.

However, the funding commitment made by Mike Rann on the 13th May 2005 when he was in the United Kingdom to unveil a new regional air service to Port Lincoln appears to have flown along with the 'new' regional air service.

Meanwhile in 2007 the Government spends \$31 million putting trams down North Terrace and retrofitting wind turbines and solar panels to government buildings.

This Government is just wasting money and ignoring real infrastructure needs around the state.

"The state government must get its priorities right if this state is to progress instead of the continual backward slide that is particularly evident in country South Australia under Labor.

"I call on Transport Minister Pat Conlon to deliver on his leader's promise," she said. ENDS

