



Budget should act on social injustice

4th June 2008

The government has the opportunity to build the state's social justice and economic prosperity with its 2008 budget, using the extensive additional funds from GST and mining royalties, Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said.

"People living in regional areas have a lower life expectancy and, while primary health care is identified as the base on which all health care stands, it is the area that this government is targeting for cuts," she said.

"With such healthy state revenues, the government can and should take another look particularly at primary health care in rural and regional South Australia."

Mrs Penfold said primary health care is delivered by health workers with close access to the community and includes GPs and district hospitals.

She is worried that at least five hospitals could be lost on Eyre Peninsula with the government downgrading them to old age facilities with funding responsibility transferred to the even more remote federal government.

"Reducing basic health services leads to increased waiting lists particularly for the poor and regional people, with some missing out altogether on essential surgical and other therapeutic procedures."

Mrs Penfold has called for a review of the PATS scheme to take account of the current escalating travel and other costs associated with accessing specialist treatment.

She criticised Labor's population-based funding policy that drains money from the country to put into monuments like the Marjorie Jackson-Nelson hospital, and Labor's removal of professionals under the flawed Shared Services model that simply further emasculates health delivery while imposing greater social injustice on rural and regional South Australia.

Infrastructure and mining

Mrs Penfold also said that small schools such as Port Neill must be supported.

"We are on the verge of a mining boom which brings with it a lift in population in rural areas, with schools close to home for primary students becoming a matter of social justice for families," she said.

Mrs Penfold said economic prosperity rests on appropriate infrastructure to support wealth producing businesses that provide the state's revenue and therefore income for social action.

"Of the \$33.6 million set down for road safety, \$29.4 million is for widening road shoulders, not for new work. The Lock to Cummins road is among many on Eyre Peninsula that need to be widened particularly now mining is imminent.

“Rail urgently needs upgrading to a level that can transport minerals. This is one of the many weaknesses in our infrastructure that mining prospects have identified and where this state government has funded the equivalent of less than half a kilometre of rail on a line that is over 600 kms long.

“Thevenard must be deepened to take at least Panamax size ships to handle the increase in exports from that port. The larger Cape Bulker ships that are now the industry norm require around 18 to 20 metres depth of water.

“Iluka’s bid to mine zircon sands and export to its facility in Western Australia for processing points to another area where we are weak. We should be value-adding right here to increase our economic prosperity, however power and water are an issue at Ceduna because of the lack of facilitation by this government of private enterprise projects” she said.

Research, airport

Mrs Penfold said the Port Lincoln airport is the state’s busiest regional airport however Lower Eyre Peninsula District Council’s small ratepayer base would find it virtually impossible to fund a capital infrastructure upgrade of upwards of \$15 million or more without help from the government.

Minnipa Research Station and Sims Farm have an active and important role to play in delivering farming practices that work successfully with climate change while the Lincoln Marine Science Centre should be funded as a world class centre of excellence in research along with corresponding degree-level courses.

“I am worried that instead we will see further funding cuts or funding that does not match inflation.

“The opportunities are open for the government to do more than talk about its support for mining and for social justice for regional South Australia in this budget,” Mrs Penfold said.

“Labor’s penchant for taxpayer funded depreciating-liabilities like the retro-fitted solar panels for the Adelaide airport instead of income-earning, job-creation assets is leading this state into another State Bank bankruptcy,” 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