

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr BROCK (Frome) (16:03): Thank you, Mr Speaker. As my honourable colleague over here said, I have been a mayor, so I expect a bit of heckling, but I appreciate the protocol of the state parliament. I would just like to commend the bill to the house and, in doing so, I would also like to acknowledge in my maiden speech my colleagues present here today. I have to admit that, being my third sitting week in parliament, I am still finding it a bit daunting. I am still finding my way around the corridors, but I have found where the canteen is and where the toilets are, so that is the main thing.

Members interjecting:

Mr BROCK: I thought it was quiet, but I will take that as a bit of joviality. I would like to sincerely thank the electors of Frome for voting for me through the democratic process. I assure all the constituents of Frome, and my fellow members present here today, that I will do my very best to not only represent them but also work with the elected government, the opposition and my other parliamentary colleagues within this great institution to ensure that South Australia benefits from all our decisions in this chamber.

I would also like to mention that I am very passionate about regional South Australia in particular, and I would like to work towards regional South Australia's share of resources from this government being recognised and implemented in the future.

Before proceeding, I want to sincerely thank my partner, Lyn, my children and, in particular, our 12 grandchildren for their assistance, their patience and their understanding. It is very hard for them to comprehend the move from being a mayor to the position of a state member of the South Australian parliament. However, as time proceeds, they are becoming more understanding, but they are still a bit concerned that they may not be able to see me as often as previously.

Family is very important to Lyn and me, and our children and grandchildren are our priority. This was the reason for becoming involved with local government for the first time 20 years ago and also for undertaking the role of mayor of the Port Pirie Regional Council. Children are our leaders of tomorrow, and we need to do whatever we can to ensure that we all leave a better environment for them.

Being an Independent candidate in a by-election was a very daunting experience, indeed. Independent candidates virtually have nowhere to turn to for advice or for resources to manage a campaign. However, in my case, from nowhere appeared a very small group of passionate volunteers to assist with this campaign. We may be novices, but we learnt as we proceeded, and we had lots of fun learning. At the end of the day, I must admit, the majority of those volunteers had no interest whatsoever in politics but, by the end of the campaign, they were not only interested in politics, they were very passionate about regional South Australia, and South Australia in particular, and the feeling was one of great achievement.

On behalf of the constituents of Frome, I would also like to sincerely thank the former member, Rob Kerin. Rob carried out his duties as the member for Frome with great passion and dedication. He also carried out the duties of premier of this great state and also leader of the opposition after the current government came to power. I know the sacrifices that I made as a mayor, let alone the sacrifices Rob has made in his roles over the previous 15 years. Again, Rob, congratulations.

The electorate of Frome—named after E.C. Frome, the third surveyor-general of South Australia—is a very diverse and productive electorate, stretching from the industrial, commercial and retail city of Port Pirie to the agricultural areas of the beautiful township of Clare and the towns of Auburn, Crystal Brook, Gladstone, Georgetown, Laura, Mintaro, Penwortham, Port Broughton, Snowtown, Tarlee and Riverton.

Mrs Redmond: And Yacka.

Mr BROCK: And Yacka. You're right, and I apologise for that. However, it is a diverse electorate, covering over 7,000 square kilometres. I am finding that, over the last three weeks, I have gradually come to grips with all the issues across the whole electorate—doing 4,000 kilometres in the last 2½ weeks.

The current boundaries have been in place since 1991, and were first contested and won by Rob Kerin in 1993. The largest community within the electorate is Port Pirie, where the major employer is the Nyrstar lead and zinc smelter, followed by the Port Pirie Regional Health Service (in the way of numbers of employed people).

Port Pirie was proclaimed the first provincial city in South Australia and at one point was the fourth busiest port in Australia. Port Pirie also boasted having the three rail gauges, where all trains traversing Australia needed to stop and transfer passengers, goods and freight before continuing their journeys across this great nation.

There were also three major oil company installations with large bulk storage tanks for the various petroleum products, a large maritime and stevedoring industry, a Coca-Cola bottling plant, bread and cake factories, and during the Second World War the local aerodrome served as a training facility for over 4,000 pilots from all over Australia.

Port Pirie is currently rebirthing itself and the optimism is tremendous throughout the community and region, and it is working towards becoming a retail commercial service outlet for the north.

The second largest location is Clare, which is a great tourist destination, with the main employment being derived from tourism, sheep, beef cattle and grain growing and, as we are all aware, it is renowned for its vineyards and great quality wines.

With most employment activities within the electorate of Frome being mostly price takers, that is, the prices are dictated by overseas demands, and with what has been happening with the global financial meltdown, it is becoming very hard to manage. However, knowing the people of Frome, we will persevere and in the finish we will all be stronger for the struggle. Whilst the overheads continue to increase, the final price for the product is diminishing. This is a very daunting thought.

The electorate of Frome has been, not recently but for some time now, adversely affected by the 'state of Adelaide' attitude, which has seen enormous centralisation occur over many years, and this is still occurring with major moves by the state government. This has not only closed many of our services but has also resulted in a continuous exodus of many of our youth to Adelaide and elsewhere.

This has been no more evident than with the long and unpopular implementation of the shared services which, I must say, has still not been finalised. If this goes ahead in its final form, we will see partners and families of those affected having to relocate from regional South Australia, and Frome is no exception.

This move has a domino effect on associated services, these being: reductions in school teachers, SAPOL and health, to mention a few. These service personnel numbers are based on the number of students and also the population numbers of the region concerned (wherever the services may be located).

Whilst there are rural assistance packages for people to access across the electorate, and South Australia, they are at times very hard to access and understand. Even when they are accessed, the service may not be available due to the fact that it may have been a victim of government rationalisation. I would hope that when this government goes forward it takes these items into consideration.

To try to combat these issues, the regional development boards, namely, the Mid North Regional Development Board at Clare and the Southern Flinders Ranges Development Board at Port Pirie, are working tirelessly to create employment opportunities. The so-called resource boom occurring to the north of the state, is a term which I believe has been used for political gain. The only activities occurring are the exploration activities.

Since writing this report, there are a lot of industries feeling the pinch now because of the global economic situation. The largest activity is at Roxby Downs, and even there they are feeling the pinch at the moment, where they are getting ready for the final products, and also the activity at Prominent Hill. There are numerous mining opportunities taking place; however, with the global financial activities and the global uncertainty these projects may not materialise for many years. We just hope that the world comes to its senses and realises that we should all be going forward in a positive manner, not negative.

Another issue facing any prospect of resource activities continuing is the adequate and guaranteed supply of water to the northern cities, in particular to the northern sector of the state. This issue also confronts other parts of the electorate of Frome, and my fellow members can be assured that I will be working with everyone in this chamber to ensure that this subject is continually in our focus and that we give it the utmost consideration and implementation to ensure that not only the electorate of Frome but all regional South Australia, and the Eyre Peninsula in particular, has guaranteed water. Unlike the surrounding areas of Adelaide, these other parts of the state do not have the luxury of having adequate, if any, water catchment facilities to be able to store the water in aquifers or dams.

For this state to prosper we need to not only focus on the water issue but also on health issues and facilities across the region, which in the past 12 months has caused great concern and uncertainty in regional South Australia, and I mention the original South Australian Country Health Care Plan that was delivered to communities across regional South Australia.

I do not believe that people living in capital cities realise the importance and appreciate the dependence that country people place on having reliable and easy access to hospital and medical facilities. Whilst another plan came out, the uncertainty is creating issues with the elderly people of our communities.

Hospitals are the safety net and, in some locations, the largest providers of employment opportunities, and the uncertainty was causing great stress for the elderly. This was of great concern to not only the larger locations across the whole state but, in particular, smaller townships where we all appreciate and understand the necessity to have continual improvement and reviews of all services that this state provides to the residents.

However, I believe communication, clear and precise, is what the communities are looking for, and to be able to have genuine input and suggestions to any changes to both the health system and/or any other facilities that we may have to rationalise or review.

Another area which we as a state do not seem to be focusing enough resources on is education. I know that the stimulus package has just come out, however, prior to the global financial meltdown all South Australians were crying out the same message: lack of skilled labour.

However, prior to the financial meltdown across the globe, all members and all South Australians were crying the same message: lack of skilled labour. However, we do not appear to be providing adequate educational resources and facilities for both education and training opportunities across this great state. In particular, in regional parts of South Australia classrooms are becoming crowded and many do not have adequate air-conditioning, and some public schools may not have that luxury. I am sure that all members know how uncomfortable it has been with the high temperatures recently and how hard it is to concentrate outside this chamber, once they get out into the open environment.

While I may have been a bit critical of the shortfalls across this great state in regard to government responsibilities, there is one area which has been of great concern to Port Pirie residents and the region, and also to the whole state, that is, the image that has been focused on Port Pirie for many years involving high lead levels in the blood of children living in Port Pirie.

I congratulate this government, in particular minister John Hill and the Premier, for their great work and the relationship they have with Nyrstar, the Port Pirie lead smelter and Port Pirie Regional Council. This is a working partnership between the Port Pirie smelter, the Port Pirie

Regional Council, the Department of Health, the Environment Protection Authority, the whole of state government and, more importantly, the whole community of Port Pirie. The whole community of Port Pirie believes in the project TenBy10 and is getting right behind it. The aim of all the partners is to have 95 per cent of children living in Port Pirie with a lead in blood reading of 10 micrograms per decilitre by the end of 2010.

This project has been in place for just over two years and there has been a remarkable reduction in the number of children with reducing lead in blood readings. The local smelter has committed nearly \$70 million to environmental improvements, including enclosing the blast furnace of the smelter—something that everyone has been talking about for the last 25 years. I reinforce that this \$70 million is to be spent on environmental improvements—no more and nothing extra towards the bottom dollar to the financial gain of the smelter.

The reason for mentioning the above subject is simple. We all have different views both politically and personally, but if we all put aside these differences and work collaboratively together we can achieve great results. I know that every member here will put their constituents and South Australia at the top of their priorities and always place them ahead of politics and self.

Before I conclude, I have to say that, before entering this house—which I do with great pride—I spent the last 20 years serving the people living in areas surrounding Port Pirie. I did that by sitting on many community committees—far too many to mention. I worked in various positions at the local smelter at Port Pirie before retiring 18 months ago. I have been an owner-operator of a roadhouse at Port Augusta, where I initially employed 15 people and then 45 people after three years. Prior to that I was a manager for BP Australia at Port Augusta, covering nearly 80 per cent of the northern areas of this great state.

One of the things I have always believed throughout the past 20 years, and even prior to that when I operated the roadhouse and worked at BP Australia, is that working as a team is the only and best way in which to achieve results. I assure all members present today and the constituents of Frome that I am here to work with government members and all my other colleagues to ensure that we do the best for this great state and our children and grandchildren.

In closing, I thank all members for listening to my maiden speech. I am looking forward to meeting all members in a more informed manner as I go along. I am still learning—and I make no bones about that. I will be sitting here listening. I am not one to jump in. When I do jump in, then I will have my facts correct. I want to work with all members on both sides of politics towards a better future for all South Australians.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!