

Speech

House of Assembly - Wednesday, 29 September 2010, Page 1465

APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr BROCK (Frome) (19:30): We all understand that any government and, in any case, any responsible person or company needs to adjust their budget according to the opportunity for their income to offset their expenditure. This state has been promoting the many opportunities for resource commodities and the great additional opportunities with the rewarded and awarded projects that we have achieved with defence and renewable energy.

The state has been very fortunate with the opportunities that we have been successful in but, as the Treasurer states, we have had the global financial crisis and the loss of expected revenue from the GST share from the commonwealth government. As we are all aware, Australia and indeed South Australia escaped the worst of the crisis and, whilst our state received a great share of the commonwealth stimulus package moneys, I believe that we have missed the boat with long-term planning.

We have, with the pause that was created in the activities as a result of the global financial crisis, had the opportunity to look at getting people ready for work when the resumption occurs; that is, when the GFC has been overcome and mining activities re-establish themselves in the north of South Australia. However, I think we have not grasped the opportunity for funding to look at that training. This government seems not to have grasped the opportunity, with funding to adult education being slashed.

Also the reduction of TAFE activities in regional locations is not the right direction that we should be going as a state and/or as a government. We have people looking to be upskilled or retrained in lots of areas, and here we have this opportunity now being squandered. How can these people get the required training to be able to apply for positions with mining opportunities, renewable energy opportunities or anything else that may eventuate in the future?

We have not sent a very positive message for business opportunities within the regional areas by eliminating the funding for Regional Development Australia after 2013. We should be increasing the activities of these sectors to encourage activities in regional South Australia.

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit potential businesspeople in China, and I have now introduced some of those people I visited to the relevant ministers. I understand that there are now opportunities in the pipeline to gain from these companies' involvement in this state. One of those is in the area of renewable energy, and if that is all that was achieved as a result of my visit to China last year I am very happy with that. This trip was assisted by our trade people in Shanghai, and I must congratulate them for the great work they did.

However, with this budget, these areas for establishing and promoting trade are being dramatically reduced or, in some cases, eliminated. How are we to promote if we do not have representation in these regions, particularly in the Asian and Chinese regions? This move, together with proposed cuts to PIRSA, which means savings of \$80 million plus a loss of 180 jobs, certainly will not assist the welfare and the growth opportunities for activities in regional South Australia, nor will it assist with export potentials.

The electorate of Frome, along with other electorates in this state, has a proud wine industry which not only provides great export earnings for the state but also is very active in promoting tourism activities for people not only within the state of South Australia but also interstate and overseas. The \$7 million cut to the cellar door subsidy will diminish the opportunity and the ability of our winemakers, especially the smaller ones, to showcase our famous wine produce to the Australian domestic market. It will also be a hindrance and a restriction to the export market all over the world.

While there was no mention in the budget regarding the closure of any schools in regional South Australia, or across South Australia, it appears that the funding criteria for smaller schools may create more issues than opportunities. These schools, even though they may have smaller numbers than metropolitan schools, still deserve to have the same opportunities as their counterparts in Adelaide.

The main area of concern is the removal of the small schools grant, being up to \$30,000 per school, which is for small schools in regional areas. If we take this amount of grant money away from some of these smaller regional schools—and there are numerous ones across regional South Australia—we may, as a result, lose the school. If that eventuates, the community shrinks.

I have today requested a select committee be established to investigate the best opportunities for regional and outback school bus services, which could be more effective and better value for money than the current system. However, going forward we must ensure that schools and relative transport for schoolchildren in regional and outback South Australia is not affected, and is improved.

As we are all very well aware, or we should be, our communities are already facing great challenges and are under great pressure. If we lose a school, or start taking students away from one of these smaller schools, the communities that they are in will suffer the loss of shopping and associated activities, which will result in a further loss of confidence and also retail and employment opportunities.

Also, there is no indication in this budget that funding for country hospitals is to be reduced, but we must remember that we have to ensure that as many services are available as possible for our people to be able to get the required attention and the medical facilitation. I have asked the Minister for Health for a review of the PAT system, and I await a reply with a copy of this review.

The reimbursement costs for these services, with regard to travel and accommodation, has not been reviewed or increased since 2001—this has been going on for 10 years. It is an issue that this government, and the previous government, should not be proud of. Again, the sick and the less fortunate have to bear the brunt of the required cuts to balance a budget. Again, regional South Australians have been asked to pay for the services that are readily available, for less cost, in metropolitan Adelaide.

Another area of concern is the land tax payments. I know that the threshold and the various brackets were adjusted at the last state election, however this state is still the most expensively taxed state in this regard. It certainly does not encourage the establishment of business opportunities in South Australia, and in particular, regional locations. I understand that this state's land tax liability is 70 per cent above the national average and over 500 per cent above the land tax liabilities in Western Australia.

However, on a positive note, I am thankful to the Minister for Health, who has recently approved the four renal dialysis machines for the Port Pirie Regional Health Service—a service that is gratefully appreciated by the patients that now do not have to travel three times per week to Port Augusta to receive this service.

As said earlier, budgets are very difficult to balance and it is no different with our own personal budgets. If we have to reduce expenditure, for whatever reason, then we must ensure that the must have items are maintained. The like to have items may have to be deferred or reduced, to ensure that the items required for our day-to-day existence are maintained and improved.

We can increase areas for income, such as increasing taxes and the like, which has happened in this budget. This move certainly does not encourage confidence or increased activities by business and/or the general community. I understand the need to balance our budgets, however we need to ensure that we do it in a responsible manner and, whilst people may elect to state that this is a responsible way to achieve the savings, it is again the less fortunate that are bearing the cuts.

The Treasurer may be saying that this is a responsible budget, and that this state has retained its AAA credit rating. However, the people who have contributed to this AAA credit rating retention, have again being the people who can least afford to contribute.