

**Hansard 11-9-2008**

**The Hon. R.L. BROKENSHIRE (16:52):** This is my first opportunity in the parliament to acknowledge and congratulate His Excellency the Governor, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce, on his appointment. I also congratulate the government on this appointment and note the multipartisan support for the Governor. It is a wonderful appointment for South Australia, and this Governor follows on from several with whom I had the privilege of working when I was previously in parliament and who were very focused on the best interests of South Australia. I wish the Governor and his wife every success in their most important position.

However, I was disappointed with the lack of vision, strategies and new initiatives I expected to see introduced yesterday in the new session of parliament. In fact, I expected to pick up *The Advertiser* yesterday morning and read a front page talking about the great new initiatives of the Rann government because, effectively, I saw the Governor's address as the start of an 18-month election campaign.

Traditionally, this government has been notorious for leaking key initiatives to start a good media day. However, I think that that went down like a lead balloon yesterday; in fact, most of the members of the media I spoke to said that they were surprised that there was nothing new at all. Apart from the announcement of a couple of small pieces of legislation on law and order, yesterday's speech offered nothing other than the recycling of what all South Australians had already been told.

I want to start by talking about the AAA credit rating, and in my maiden speech I said that I was concerned that this government was rewriting history. Whilst, technically, the AAA rating was returned to South Australians under the watch of the current government, history will show that the hard work on getting back the AAA rating was actually done by the former government. I think it is important to put that on the public record because I like history to be written correctly and it ties in with what I will have to say about finances in a short while.

Let us for a minute remember that in the budget papers billions of dollars have been recently committed to be borrowed for South Australia. The Treasurer himself is on the public record as saying that these borrowings are at the upper limit and that the fact of the matter is that there is probably not much room to move now in relation to further borrowings for South Australians, through the government, before the AAA credit rating is at risk.

I note in the Governor's speech that the government says that it believes that the biggest challenge facing South Australia is the issue of water security. There is no 'believe': it is a statement of fact. Nothing is more important at the moment for South Australia than securing a permanent water supply and, to that end, I was disappointed that there was no commitment in the Governor's speech to go forward with a proper plan for stormwater harvesting.

When you see Adelaide receiving 21 inches of rain a year on average (with our having a pretty handy winter for the first time in three years), and you see the amount of water running out to sea, damaging the gulf and being absolutely wasted, it is almost beyond belief that the government does not realise that one of the key ways of addressing a permanent water supply for South Australia is stormwater harvesting.

In the 1990s, I spent quite a lot of time in Texas, California and Israel looking at how they manage recycled water and stormwater. They do not waste a drop. I do not understand why we are just focusing on a desalination plant (which seemed to come in late on the government's agenda) and not focusing more on trying to wean us as much as possible off the River Murray.

The fact of the matter is that we will always have to rely on the River Murray for some of Adelaide's water, but it could be only a small amount if we harvested stormwater. From what I am told (and I understand a reasonable amount about the hydrology behind the Adelaide Plains), whilst there are several aquifers, most of them should easily take up aquifer storage. Effectively, there is a mass of natural reservoirs under the metropolitan area, yet we hear talk about expanding Mount Bold, which will have a significant environmental impact on that precious part of the Adelaide Hills and the Mount Lofty Ranges, and I know that area like

the back of my hand. Of course, there is no funding in the budget papers for that initiative, anyway.

I put on the public record a plea to the Premier to go to the Prime Minister and negotiate additional money from the commonwealth government to assist the state with stormwater harvesting. Billions of dollars have been allocated for water initiatives through the commonwealth by both the previous Howard government and now the Rudd government but, at \$600 million or thereabouts, we have nowhere near our share. Victoria has received \$1 billion, but we should receive far more because we have to work harder to ensure that we have a guaranteed water supply.

With respect to the historic agreement earlier this year, the sweeping reforms to the management of the Murray-Darling Basin system will occur only if the relevant legislation is passed through all houses of parliament in Australia. Whilst I understand and congratulate the state government on indicating its will (and it will certainly have the support of Family First in handing over powers from our state to the commonwealth), I am still concerned about what will happen in Victoria.

There needs to be no backdoor deals done as this legislation is framed because Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland must give total powers to the commonwealth government as well. It is the only way we are going to get a fair outcome for the Murray-Darling system, particularly for South Australia.

In relation to the \$3.1 billion the commonwealth has allocated to purchase over-allocated water licences, it disappoints and frustrates me that, whether it is a Liberal or Labor government, simply because it is someone who is not from within their immediate team or their bureaucracy who comes up with ideas, they are totally discounted. The Wentworth group of scientists were not engaged by the Howard government, nor have they been engaged by the Rudd government or by the Rann government. When there are brilliant people such as Professor Mike Young, a South Australian who is passionate about helping to fix the river system and coming up with other initiatives for a permanent water supply for Adelaide, it amazes me that governments are turning their back on opportunities, instead of embracing those people and saying, 'We have a major problem here; can you help?' I still believe that those people would come in and assist.

However, when it comes to the \$3.1 billion allocated for the buy-back of over-allocated water, there is still only about \$130 million to \$150 million being put on the table. Obviously, buying back over-allocated water at this time will not fix the problem we have in the Lower Lakes. There is another initiative, which I have already talked about in this chamber, that could fix that problem, if the will was there between our Premier and the Prime Minister.

It is paramount that we buy back that over-allocated water now with the \$3.1 billion package. In buying back that water, we should also be advocating some sort of a rescue package for irrigators, particularly in the Riverland area of South Australia, the Lower Lakes, and the lower areas of the river, below lock 1. It has been done in other agricultural and manufacturing industries. If it is done properly, I am advised that the buy-back of all the over-allocated water would occur within a very short time. I encourage the government to immediately put further pressure on the Rudd government to set up a better structure going forward so that we can buy back over-allocated water licences.

As I mentioned earlier, the Governor's speech talks about investigations into doubling the capacity of reservoirs in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Well, I live in the Mount Lofty Ranges, and I can tell members that climate change and drought are having the same effect there as they are having everywhere else. Rainfall has dropped by a great percentage in the past 10 or 15 years. In my own town, we used to have as high as 36 inches (in the old language) of rainfall in a year, year in and year out. However, we have had nowhere near that for many years now. So, that tells me that, if you are going to double the capacity of reservoirs such as Mount Bold, you will still have to rely on filling them by pulling water out of the River Murray. Again, that shows the importance of taking a much more visionary approach and looking at stormwater harvesting.

Further into the Governor's speech yesterday, the government talks about health, in particular, country hospitals, as follows:

The government has also committed to capital works at country hospitals, including redevelopments for Berri, Whyalla and Ceduna.

There was no mention of the Country Health Plan yesterday—the failed Country Health Plan that was going to close up to 43 hospitals in rural and regional South Australia. It was only the power of the people and assistance from some sectors of both houses of the parliament that stopped the government from permanently damaging fair and reasonable health services and facilities in country South Australia.

I now move on to the Glenside campus. The Governor's speech states that a significant part of the government's reform and investment includes a \$130 million redevelopment of the Glenside campus, with work expected to commence in 2009. I am very concerned that the Glenside campus is being interfered with in the wrong way when it comes to what they are going to do with the real estate there. Shopping centres and other commercial facilities are not the way to go with the land out there at Glenside. As far as a new \$43 million film studio goes, that should never be built on such an important piece of land. We need specialist mental health facilities. We need them to be improved and upgraded and brought into this century, and the place to do that is clearly at Glenside, where there is a good transport system, close access to our tertiary hospitals, and easy access for families to visit patients. We should be modelling a state of the art centre of excellence for mental health at Glenside, not flogging off land to try to reduce debt and not setting up a film studio there.

If there is a need for a new film studio, I would like to see it set up in the south (and I have written to the Premier in this regard) in the new precinct being developed along the rail corridor at Noarlunga Centre. It was always the plan to have accommodation and new industries and new opportunities for jobs desperately needed in the south. Put the \$43 million into a film studio there, and build supported accommodation for transitional mental health patients at Glenside. That would be good government, and I would commend the government if it were to do that. However, at the moment it is an ad hoc plan. In fact, it is the wrong plan, and it will not work in the long-term best interests of rehabilitating mental health patients. Remember that one in five South Australians will have short or long-term mental health problems, and it is a growing problem that needs to be addressed and not swept under the carpet.

I hope that the Premier will see some wisdom in the letter I have sent to him and that he will help create a new industry opportunity with that money he is allocating by setting it up in the south. I see that the Premier allocated \$2 million, I think it was, to Scott Hicks to do a film down there. That in itself is an acknowledgment of the importance of the Fleurieu Peninsula. Many great films have already been made down there. It has a fantastic landscape, with a lot of different terrain and topography. There are art centres down there and some of our great artists and musicians live down there. The culture is already there, and it sets the scene for developing a film studio there.

The paper also talks about public transport, about the \$2 billion debt that has been incurred for the electrification of the train lines in the Adelaide metropolitan area, the extension of the tram line and some upgrades of tram facilities right through into the deeper part of the western suburbs. Whilst the western suburbs still need improvement in public transport, compared to the south, the north and the east, they have much better public transport now.

We have a situation where we have a deplorable road network from Victor Harbor in the south right through to Gawler in the north. If \$2 billion was borrowed, I think an upgrade of public transport could have been achieved, perhaps not quite as grand as is proposed in the western suburbs, but still an upgrade for the western suburbs, the southern suburbs and the northern suburbs. A staged plan on building a proper north-south motorway could have been started. It is a significant amount of money. It was not actually spelt out before the last election that this government was going to borrow \$2 billion or \$3 billion.

I will have more to say about this, but I firmly believe that, if the government is going to put the state into debt to the tune of billions of dollars—I am not talking tens of millions here; I am talking thousands of millions—I believe it should tell the public about that with its policies before an election. Therefore, if people then go and support that particular party—in this case the Labor government—there is a proper mandate to go out and borrow that money. There is no mandate at the moment as far as I am concerned for the government to be putting our

future generations back into debt, particularly at a time when we have had record revenue. We should be in better shape than we are. Again, on this point about transport, in the address yesterday the Governor said:

It includes further upgrades of Adelaide's north-south transport corridor.

Well, I am not quite sure what a north-south transport corridor is at the moment. I know about a couple of underpasses and an upgrade at Laffers Triangle. It goes on to say that there will be new projects at Oaklands Park and on Fleurieu Peninsula. I hope that includes some work on the Victor Harbor Road, because whoever manages the engineering at Transport SA needs to be spoken to pretty sternly by the minister. I do not blame this government alone. In fact, I was a member of a government that was involved in the same process for some dual lane work done on Fleurieu Peninsula over the past 10 years. There have been some over-passing lanes created here and there.

The engineers at Transport SA need to do a lot better when they do their design and tender. If you drive down along the Victor Harbor road at the moment, you will actually see holes in the road with these double passing lanes that are probably up to 150 millimetres in depth, and the membrane underneath the bitumen is now exposed. That is a major tourism and commuter road. If you go along South Road down to Yankalilla (in the member for Kurna's electorate), you will actually see that the double passing lanes there have not only broken up but it is now like a rollercoaster. So, money not being managed properly is not delivering good value for South Australians. In fact, those particular roads down there, and many others in this state, need urgent attention.

One thing that really annoyed me in the address was this particular sentence, which I will quote from page 4:

It continues to work towards reforming WorkCover in order to deliver a worker's compensation scheme that provides injured workers with fair and equitable financial and other support that reduces the average levy rate for employers and is fully funded as soon as practicable.

I disagree with the government on that. In fact, as an employer myself, only a couple of days ago I received quite a bit of propaganda that is sent out all the time in a publication called *Newslink*. It refers to WorkCover legislative changes being passed, and it has the CEO espousing the virtues of the former chairman of the board and how great he was and what a wonderful job he did in getting WorkCover back into shape. The bottom line is that all that has happened with WorkCover so far is that it has done over legitimate injured workers.

I have started to meet with some of these groups since I have come back into the parliament. It is very sad when one talks to these people who have been injured, and their families, and you see the lack of case management and the lack of real support to get them back into the workforce, and now this government is cutting their entitlements. Of course, if you are a rorter, you should be hit hard.

The legislation was already there for that, but the government has done irreparable damage to workers by reducing worker entitlements. So I, in fact, condemn that paragraph, because it is not about fair and equitable opportunities for workers; it is about unfair and inequitable opportunities now put before them. In fact, they do not have an opportunity because the law now says, 'No matter what happens, after a certain period of time your entitlements are cut.'

I want to finish on a couple of points. The address also refers to education, as follows:

The 2009 school year will see compulsory age education legislation come into effect. That will ensure that all young people are in school or training until they are aged 17 or achieve their SACE or equivalent qualification.

I have serious concerns about this. It might sound good on paper to say that you are keeping students at school longer, but one size does not fit all, and some of the behaviour problems that we see coming out into the community now—and particularly in secondary school—I believe are a direct result of what we have already seen in the past few years when the school age was extended to 16.

I happen to have personal knowledge of a great young person working for us on our farm. He is 17 now and he left school well over a year ago. He has improved immensely in his learning capacity and in his enthusiasm, all because we gave him a traineeship through the

school (and I commend the school for assisting us with that) and now we have him on a full apprenticeship. He is doing Certificate II in agriculture and I hope he will end up doing Certificate III. He is a fantastic worker, he is generating money, he has empathy and he is also helping us to grow food along with other farmers around this state.

However, if he was forced to stay at school until he was 17, because he was not able to opt into the type of opportunity that we have given him now, he would be the worse off for that, and the school might have found that some of its resources would have gone into assisting him in his general management rather than into curriculum development. If we are going to leave these people there for a longer time, we have to ensure that there are opportunities and flexibility in the education system or we will have problems with these people and will need many more student counsellors and SSOs.

Turning now to the final part of the Governor's speech, it states that the Social Inclusion Unit will continue to implement strategies designed to make reductions in the number of homeless people. Before 2002, the Rann government promised to halve homelessness during the government's lifetime. I was interested in that promise because it reminded me of a promise that Prime Minister Hawke made back in the early 90s or late 80s, when he said that no Australian child would live in poverty after a certain date. Sadly, there are more Australian children living in poverty now than there were back then.

I commend the government for having a strategy to reduce homelessness and to address the problems of people who are sleeping rough on our streets. However, I know that some members of the Social Inclusion Unit are still very concerned about whether it will meet the overall targets. I am hoping that the government will accelerate its efforts to assist these most disadvantaged people. After not coming into Adelaide much at all for two years and now coming in virtually every day, I can very easily see, when driving down different roads into the city proper, that there are still a lot of homeless people out there, a lot of people doing it tough, and a lot of people who are sleeping rough.

Towards the end, the Governor's speech talks about a ministry for the northern suburbs. There is no doubt that the north and south need services but, if the ministers of the government are absolutely focused on needs, one would have to question whether or not there is a need for an office and a specific minister for the north and the south. I intend to do an audit of achievements of what has happened with the first office that was set up, the Office for the Southern Suburbs. I suggest that, with the amount of money spent on that as against the programs that have been delivered, it may well be that an allocation of money for education specifically going to additional SSO areas in the south and the north, with money also being allocated to economic development opportunities in the south and the north, and further money being allocated to more hospital beds in the south and the north (as three examples) would have been a much better investment than has been the case.

I am concerned that much of the attention of these offices is focused on peripheral areas and the warm and fuzzy matters, rather than on actual delivery of better services. In the south you can see that the focus for the City of Onkaparinga (that I commend) was to take the bull by the horns and generate a lot of the economic development down there, a role that really should be very secondary for local government but, in this instance, it became a primary role because it was not delivered by the Office for the Southern Suburbs.

I now want to turn to policing. I note with interest that the address stated that the government will continue to recruit more police (which is good) with a further 165 cadets in training at the Fort Largs Police Academy who will graduate by the end of this year. I intend to drill further into this matter in the near future. The government made a commitment (and so did the opposition at the last election) that whoever won government would deliver 400 additional police officers by the end of this term of office. On average, that is 100 police officers a year. Attrition sits between 125 and 150 police officers a year. Like most departments in South Australia, because of our ageing population, there is the potential over this term for attrition to accelerate, particularly because there has just been another enterprise agreement which helps police officers to maximise their superannuation.

I am concerned about the total number of cadets going through the academy this year if it is that 165 cadets. If that is the case, then I think it will be incredibly difficult for the government to get anywhere near the 400 additional police that it needs. If there are between 125 and 150 a year just for replacement and another 100 on top of that, it is close to 250

police officers a year, if we are going to keep up with attrition and if we are going to keep up with the new numbers.

The only point I make about that is that police officers working in the local service areas are telling me that they are not seeing these additional police, by and large, out in the local service areas yet. Here we are, only 18 months from the next state election, and they are telling me that they are often short on patrols and they are either going solo or, at times, not able to roll out the number of cars allocated on a particular shift. There is a new Minister for Police and it will take him a little while to get his head around the portfolio but I will be watching closely and trusting that the government honours its commitment to ensure that the 400 police are out there on the beat by the second Saturday in March 2010.

I will complete my remarks by saying that I was hoping for some vision, a new direction, new energy and fire in the belly from the government, and I thought it would have to start yesterday with the Governor's address on behalf of the government. But, if you read this document in detail, there is very little new initiative to inspire you. There is a lot of recycling, and it scares me that a government that is still 18 months out and starting to plan towards the next election is not coming in with a lot more vibrancy, energy, initiative and strategy than we heard in the address yesterday.

In conclusion, I hope the government has quite a bit more up its sleeve and we start to see it rolled out, because the South Australian community, by and large, is hurting at the moment; and the social dividend that was spoken about in this document yesterday certainly has not been delivered in the past couple of years. In fact, it has been a social tax hike. That is what it has been, and that is part of what is hurting people, together with fuel prices and interest rates.

I note that the government is saying that there will be a social dividend as well as an economic dividend. I will support the government if it delivers those, otherwise we will be doing whatever we can to expose the government for its weaknesses and to get it focused on giving a true economic dividend and a true social dividend for the South Australian community.