



Parliament of South Australia
SPEECH
18 September 2018

FRANCES BEDFORD MP JP *Member for Florey*

APPROPRIATION BILL 2018

Ms BEDFORD (Florey) (22:38): The first budget of the Marshall government has been handed down and, as this is the first time I will speak on a budget as an Independent and grandmother of the house, I find myself able to say a little more a little differently than I may have done in the past.

Like all budgets, it contains good news and bad news. The populist phrases of 'more jobs, lower costs and better services' is only part of the story of this budget and, as with all budgets, the politics of this budget, the bad news, has taken a little while to trickle out into reality and the consciousness of those it will affect: the electors of South Australia.

There is a real difference between democracy and politics. Democracy is not easily explained these days, especially when people see federal leaders they have voted for being regularly rotated between election cycles and topics like the participation of women in parliament becoming such a damaging and damning indictment of those trying to make a contribution at the highest end of our participatory democracy.

I believe candidate selection is one of the most important parts of any democratic system and hope it never relies on the wealth of a person or the number of promises that a candidate has had to make. Like diversity and dissent, candidate selection is an integral part of democracy where politics often has undue influence.

Politics is the activity and action used to gain and hold power and influence. Politics has a hand in every decision of every person and every committee—and parliament is, after all, the mother of all committees. It means decisions are not always made for the right reasons but by weighing up the pros and cons, and there is politics in every decision and every promise and every reprioritisation.

It is admirable to want to keep promises, especially election promises, as a first step in restoring trust in both the political system that runs our democracy and us, the elected representatives of the people of this state. Election promises are the impetus for decision-making on polling day. It is important to keep promises, but it is more important not to make them if you have your fingers crossed behind your back.

State campaigns come every four years. They have become marketing cycles—duels with glossy brochures snugly positioned under arms at 60 paces. The underlying problem, though, is people no longer believe much of what is said anymore, especially in campaigns. There are good reasons for this. The old 'we have inherited a mess' carries some weight but does not really wash anymore. What could often be decoded from this line and what should be really said is, 'We have other priorities.'

People feel betrayed when they are ambushed by a loss of services not mentioned in campaigns. The further betrayal of finding that promises they heard matched in a campaign are being 'reprioritised' along electorate lines makes it much harder to regain trust. We need to be honest. As the famous line goes in the movie which this evening we shall call 'A Few Good Marines', we can handle the truth.

I want to take a look at a few issues in the budget that will hit close to home for the electors of Florey. Re-establishing the role of Modbury Hospital became a non-negotiable issue for me and the people of the north-east. As part of the suite of the now discredited measures in the Transforming Health initiative, we saw Modbury Hospital brought to its knees again. The hardworking health professionals and hospital volunteers continue to do all they can to provide good services to the residents of the north-east but, like the rest of us, they are getting a little tired of waiting to see the promises kept.

When will the money earmarked for an extended stay area in the emergency department be spent and the work finally begin on this much-needed and long-promised service? When will Modbury be properly resourced to allow the return of level 1 intensive care, allowing additional services to

be performed and removing the pressure from emergency staff currently called upon to provide a service of sorts upstairs while leaving the patients downstairs to fend for themselves?

When will money be spent on infrastructure outside, where bricks on the facade of the building are falling off and, more importantly, inside where palliative care waits for much-needed upgrade? That is not to mention a much-needed upgrade to the mental health area of Woodleigh House, which is still waiting for prioritisation.

Lyell McEwin Hospital has seen enormous changes and does great work but, without a fully functioning Modbury Hospital, people living in NALHN will never be in the same position as the people of the south, living in SALHN, who can access all the services at the Flinders Medical Centre. Moving patients between the Lyell McEwin and Modbury hospitals remains a problem without the upgrade to services. Outsourcing of patient transfers is an issue. While it might seem acceptable to say only non-urgent patients will be privately transferred, it is illogical when you consider it is mostly urgent patients who are transferred.

There is lots more to say about health, and that is why I proposed a parliamentary review of Transforming Health. Why was the motion I proposed bogged down here in the House of Assembly and adjourned on a vote of 41-2 on the Thursday before KordaMentha were called in to examine CALHN?

No-one I have spoken with believes health expenditure can be reined in in three years without an impact on patient care. I believe lots of people must have known KordaMentha were being called in on the Monday after my motion was voted down. Our health future now seems to be in the hands of bean counters rather than of health professionals. Let's hope it does not end in some sort of rationing or reprioritising of access to health care.

Pathology services are under threat. Here, I must declare a conflict of interest in that a close family member works for SA Pathology. This means I know that it is a service already working hard, not an area that can necessarily be run leaner and meaner, seeing a loss of

services and training opportunities and creating an atmosphere for the outsourcing or privatisation of the service.

Electors were given matched promises about an extension to the O-Bahn car park at the Modbury-TTP interchange, servicing the state's most used public transport route—not anymore. Reprioritisation strikes again and, while other O-Bahn stations will benefit, I am told that more commuters board at the Modbury interchange. Without extra car parking, the north-east will feel the impact of this budget measure.

No new buses are being purchased and bus routes are being closed, also spelling trouble and uncertainty about the future of public transport. People need new bus routes, but not at the expense of already poor services in other areas with needs. No-one is advocating poor management of public dollars, but we do need public services, and good public transport is vital, particularly for people relying on fixed low incomes.

Changes have been made to policing, too. The closure of the Holden Hill courthouse had a big impact on the north-east. I know that there are moves afoot to try to have that courthouse reopened, and I hope that may still be the case. Housing SA rent increases are probably necessary for some tenants and probably possible for them to pay, and some tenants might need to move on to private rental, but social housing is and remains something really needed. Private rental, if you can get it, is not always an answer. For those in the least attractive Housing SA properties, a \$5 increase means a decision between food, medicine or trying to keep up with energy costs.

The cost of living is a consideration for everyone but, when we get the promised reduction in the emergency services levy on one hand and lose much more in often other hidden cost increases, then it could be said that people have not been given the opportunity to compare impacts. Increases here and there all add up, and soon we see that we are shouldering more of the burden than we expected—or maybe we did expect it after all.

The closure of Service SA offices in Modbury, Prospect and Mitcham is a case in point. The as yet undisclosed cost of running these offices

and the criteria for the decision is a cost shift to us. In my area, we can no longer do our business close to home. We face a longer trip to either the city, Tranmere or Elizabeth. The last time I looked, there was no direct public transport route to Tranmere and there probably are none to the Elizabeth office or Lyell McEwin Hospital, for that matter. Not only is this a problem for those unable to access services online, it will impact on the prospective learner drivers and their parents in the nine schools in our area who use this office for P-plates. Their ability to make a quick trip after school becomes a much longer exercise.

Education promises are an issue, too. Funding is now being reprioritised for local high schools eager to make the much-needed changes that they thought would be possible but that are now uncertain. TAFE closures are a real blow. At the Tea Tree Gully campus, we have been on the end of reduction of services since the closure of Celia's, our hospitality school that integrated with Regency Park. Luckily, jobs are being created at our old TAFE site through Datacom, but the training opportunities that have been lost to remaining TAFE campuses mean that our people must travel further—if they can—at a cost to them.

Training may end up being privatised, too, much like the Remand Centre. This particular budget measure will finally be all about cutting wages. Instead of picking on a particular group of workers, let's have the debate about wages. If we are living beyond our means, that is one thing; share the load evenly and fairly. But where some groups do better than others, it is dishonest to start with workers. Look after workers, whether childcare workers, aged-care workers or those who work with the NDIS. These are also job growth areas, and we need to make sure that training in these areas is readily available. That is where TAFE, and the cuts to TAFE and its training, will have an impact.

Aged-care planning needs to come up to speed very quickly. We are all going to be old and, if we are not already old, we are looking after a loved one who is. Oakden-style situations are all over Australia and can no longer be ignored or tolerated. We have tough decisions to make, and we need to consider the expectations of people who use aged care. If we cannot meet the expectation of decent, affordable care, then

we need to do something about it. What is not acceptable anymore will be saying that it is a federal issue and then doing nothing about the South Australians doing it really tough while they wait for better care or the often long-off relief of a job, not an underemployment situation.

This budget grapples with some issues but leaves others out. We can have just and fair budget policies while making changes. We have good people in the Public Service. Let's hope the cut to Public Service employment leaves us with the public servants able to provide good advice and give us the ability to make good informed decisions.

Governments should never shy away from admitting mistakes have been made and should be honest in their analysis of the measures they plan to take when changing policy priorities. South Australia has led the way before and I believe can do it again. Irrespective of the party that forms government, we are charged with doing the best we can to make life as good as possible for all South Australians. Big issues need to be addressed but not at the expense of looking after the vulnerable. In the quest to get the right priorities, let's not leave anyone behind.



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