



Parliament of South Australia
SPEECH
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FRANCES BEDFORD MP JP *Member for Florey*

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Ms BEDFORD (Florey) (15:54): I thank the Governor for delivering his speech to open this Second Session of the Fifty-Fourth Parliament and thank Uncle Mickey for his Welcome to Country at the beginning of opening day proceedings. We start this new session at the halfway point of the parliamentary term. Now, two years since the last election and two years until the next, it is time to ask where we are and where we want to go. Sadly, this must now all happen through the prism of a terrible start to the bushfire season and aftermath of the arrival of the international threat of the COVID-19 virus.

Sadly, it is also a time when South Australians are telling me that 'politics as usual' is failing to deliver. So it is difficult to see how the Governor's speech on behalf of the current government delivers the basis of the promised new bold agenda. With state unemployment the highest in the nation, a health system on life support and cost-of-living pressures continuing to rise, we really do need to reset. It would not matter who was sitting on the treasury bench, they would be facing the same issues and the same need to tackle the challenges we face with bold ideas.

We need a government that behaves like a government, setting a vision and carrying the public debate by including the public; a government swapping a top-down agenda to learning from the community and an opposition that holds the government to account with its own agenda and bold ideas. That is what Australians want and deserve, what they ask of their democracy.

South Australians are not greedy; they just want the conditions and sometimes the help to make ends meet. They are capable of understanding the truth and the reality of our

situation and contributing to the debate on new ideas, participating in decision-making and seeing why choices are made. They are tired of a parliamentary system where new ideas are frowned upon—and when I say 'they' I mean the people we represent—and they are tired of the same old stale politics. After all, we are supposed to be in a free-thinking contest of ideas.

As a crossbench member, I want to see this parliament living up to the expectations South Australians have of us and that is why I will be challenging the government and the opposition this year to lift the standard and to debate an alternative agenda of ideas for a better future for our state—an agenda designed to make sure transitions are smooth and to address pressing issues which, for one reason or another, are not being addressed, an agenda shaped with other members of the crossbench, which is particularly relevant to all: my north-east electorate of Florey, the north-east community as a whole, as well as across the state and the regions of the state.

The agenda I will pursue this year will be framed around four fundamental principles that my community has told me are important and are not being addressed to their satisfaction. They are helping to reduce pressure on household budgets by limiting rising costs; keeping our local services, especially keeping our health system healthy; acting to ensure their voice is heard and their rights protected; and standing up for a fair share for neighbourhoods in the north-east.

Living in the leafy beautiful north-east it can be just as hard as anywhere else to make ends meet, especially with ever-rising costs and flatlining wages. Despite best efforts and the polished spin, jobs are scarce. Big ribbon-cutting projects like Roxby and, dare I say it, submarines, are only part of the story. Unemployment and underemployment remain real concerns for many in the north-east area. In most parts of my electorate of Florey, average incomes are lower than the statewide average and, at 8.9 per cent at the last census, unemployment is a constant worry. All of this means that for the people of Florey, like many in the neglected north-east and across the state, rising prices for the essentials of life are a real and constant concern.

As a member of state parliament, I may not be able to increase people's wages or guarantee

jobs, but I can try to make sure people are not being ripped off and protect their rights as consumers. I can help to support the truly local businesses that create local jobs. That is why I opposed the government's proposal in the last session for the deregulation of shop trading hours and I will do so again if or when the government decides to bring that bill back.

With a risk of retail oversupply in what is clearly a sluggish economy, loosening up trading hour laws would create an atmosphere for interstate big-box franchises to price out locally owned family businesses and the more local people they employ. The truth is there are already shopping centres and supermarkets across my electorate that are struggling. They do not welcome finding their business model under threat because of an ill-founded ideological crusade. Indeed, I will be acting after receiving feedback from retailers who tell me more needs to be done to protect small business from exploitation, and I will be looking to bring legislation forward that gives small traders in shopping centres a right to rent relief or an early exit if anchor tenants close up on site.

As other members would be aware, I have already given notice that I will be introducing a fuel watch bill in March to provide a 24-hour price guarantee in declared areas and for real-time price reporting everywhere else. In the past 12 months, fuel prices in South Australia have surged by up to \$30 a tank according to the RAA, while the ACCC has found Adelaide motorists can save up to \$300 a year by buying at the low point of our state's unusually erratic fuel cycles if they can find it. The fuel watch bill, which I am more than happy for the government to adopt as its own if it means it will be delivered sooner, will empower consumers to buy petrol when it is at its cheapest. Both major parties supported real-time price monitoring at the last election, so I look forward to seeing this legislation become law as soon as possible.

I will also be looking to develop legislation to improve taxpayers' rights to a wider range of payment options for government fees and charges and to ensure those who are unable to easily engage with the cashless economy are not forgotten while also looking out for those not ready to rely totally on access to online transaction systems. I will be looking to bring legislation forward to limit the constant fee hikes used by treasurers to gouge money out of

citizens, the cost of fines and hospital car parking fee rises implemented by this government being amongst the most outrageous of recent examples, although there were a fair few examples coming from the other side when they were last in office.

When you need help, you should be able to depend on local services that are there when you need them. That is why I have always fought to make sure we keep local services open in the north-east rather than forcing local residents to take long trips into the city or to regional centres further afield. I have been a fiercely proud advocate of Modbury Hospital from the time I moved into the area some 40 years ago, firstly when its management was privatised by the Liberals and then when it was downgraded by Labor. I am pleased to see the government is acting on its commitment to restore acute care services, although I wish it would happen much faster than just in time for the next election and I would like to see assurances about staffing to keep all services in place and at an acceptable level. Unsurprisingly, I can advise you I will not stop advocating for Modbury Hospital and all the other services my community needs.

On the first sitting day of this session, I tabled a petition with over 12,000 signatures calling for the government to commit to keeping Service SA centres in Modbury, Mitcham and Prospect open beyond the promised two years, again just in time for the next election. I note recent media reports suggest the minister may still be open to closing these centres at some later stage, and I will be seeking assurances from the government, through the newly installed petitions response process that was legislated in my private member's bill last year.

Like many South Australians, residents in my electorate have been disgusted by further revelations of systemic maladministration in the health system. Sadly, however, we seem to have lost our capacity to be shocked against a backdrop where, for a number of reasons, it seems it is no longer possible to hope people will be in the circumstances to do their jobs properly or safely alert authorities when they see problems. After all, it is the workers on the ground who best know how a system works, when it is not working and how it might work better.

What is new, of course, in the most recent report of the ICAC commissioner, is a better understanding of the cost of the health rorts, waste and mismanagement that have been ongoing for years. My community in the north-east is looking for a much better government response to this report. Too often in recent years it has been cost-cutting imperatives rather than patient care driving health policy in this state, and South Australians can smell that sort of initiative a mile away. What is now clear is efforts to tackle the real cause of cost blowouts have been misconceived and misdirected.

Of course, the physical evidence of all these problems is there for us to see. Ramping of ambulances at hospitals across the metropolitan area has reached disastrous levels, such that, unforgivably, we have even seen some patients die before being admitted to emergency. It seems ramping is fast becoming the new normal, and I commend the work of the Ambulance Employees Association, who have been highlighting the problems of this practice for such a long time.

On an associated topic, my past efforts to deliver universal emergency ambulance cover such as exists in other states to ensure emergency ambulance costs are fully funded should be reconsidered. Such a measure will not see emergency cases increase. Our skilled paramedics can declare which cases are not or are emergencies when the cases present. The number of emergencies will not change because of universal emergency ambulance cover, but what will change is the burden of a huge financial cost at a time when a person or a family is least able to cope because of poor health and wage loss.

I have previously said as parliamentarians we may not be able to give people a wage rise but we can ensure they get the health care they deserve when it is needed. The continuing health crisis, the crisis that has been ongoing now for many years, offers the clearest evidence of a system that is not working. With a \$300 million blowout reported in the budget of the Central Adelaide Local Health Network alone, it is clear we need to root out the waste that bedevils the health system. We need a governance structure that is focused on performance, integrity, patient care and meaningful engagement with consumers and clinicians.

KordaMentha is still at CALHN, but how long does this expensive reform measure have to stay for CALHN and what are KordaMentha really doing there now? While I was prepared to watch and see how the establishment of governing boards would improve outcomes in the health system, as I was with the Transforming Health initiative, it is now clear much more must be done. As highlighted in the ICAC report, the health system is the largest component of our state budget and the largest single spending agency, accounting for 38 per cent of all state government procurement. But I am not sure what that figure means to us using the public health system or how it is arrived at when I have been told for many years that health will soon consume the entire state budget.

There have been calls since the release of the ICAC report for a royal commission to be initiated. If the government were willing, this could be worthwhile, but we all know terms of reference can be drafted to deliver recommendations already decided. As we have seen with ongoing scandals in the banking sector and now in aged care, a royal commission is a long exercise with no guarantee of a long-term change. My own view is that a one-off inquiry is not the best approach. A budget of the size of health requires more than just the usual tools of oversight. It requires an ongoing system that monitors the integrity of public spending and administrative practice. We do not need to hire corporate liquidators. We need reform that is ongoing.

The range, scale and frequency of rorts, waste and mismanagement in the health system require culture change that will hopefully take fewer years to change than it did to entrench—another case of business as usual not passing the supermarket test anymore. I will, therefore, be looking to bring forward legislation to establish a new monitoring unit within the health portfolio with an oversight responsibility within the health system and a new unit headed by a statutory officer—a cost neutral initiative when you consider the savings that could be made.

I note also the government will be bringing back its health governance legislation and I intend to bring forward the amendments I filed last year. These will see the role of the Health Performance Council maintained and strengthened with a new systemwide health

performance charter. The new charter made by the minister will set out policies, priorities and targets for the health system and guide the chief executive of the department in developing service agreements with governing boards and other health providers.

This will help ensure devolution of decision-making in the health system will not result in a lack of systemwide direction and it will ensure the Minister for Health and Wellbeing remains clearly accountable to the parliament for systemwide health policies and not able to deflect responsibilities or problems to governing boards.

I will also be moving separately to retain health advisory councils for each local health network, which the government has proposed to abolish in the metropolitan area, in a bid to provide greater transparency and restrict the ability of the government to dissolve incorporated hospitals and most importantly prevent the privatisation of public hospitals and public health services without parliamentary approval. With proper rigour in place, there will be no need to wait to find funds for important measures like universal ambulance cover. It is clear, if we root out the rorts and waste in the health system, we will be able to afford this and other important reforms. So I will again be introducing legislation to put this issue squarely on the parliamentary agenda.

When I was first re-elected as an Independent member, my new seat included suburbs I had not previously represented. The syndrome of the safe seat had taken its toll. I recall vividly the words of one former Labor voter at the local shopping centre who told me that he was voting for me but urged me not to forget Ingle Farm and Pooraka. These are two of the largest of the new suburbs I now represent, along with the suburb of Walkley Heights, and now also all the parts of Valley View and Para Vista and some parts of Northfield. These, along with the parts of Modbury and Modbury North I still represent, are all suburbs that have not been getting a fair go for far too long.

Despite high levels of public transport usage by residents of these suburbs, there have been no significant investments to increase services and support those commuters. Despite low incomes and higher than average unemployment, investment in local schools falls far short of what is needed. Despite clear

need, local sporting clubs and community groups keep missing out on the grant funding they need to survive and grow. Little has been spent on infrastructure in these communities for years and more recently all we have seen is cuts to local services. Under the former government, it was the downgrading of Modbury Hospital. Now, under this government, we see nothing to stop the closure of our TAFE campus, the attempted closure of Service SA and the axing of the additional park-and-ride station to service the O-Bahn.

The constant threat to services in the north-east is not acceptable and is counterproductive. The more you axe services, the more you create problems in other areas of public policy. A recent study by Flinders University's Southgate Institute, headed by leading public health expert Professor Fran Baum, has reinforced my concern about how infrastructure funding and planning effort is being misdirected, to the disadvantage of some communities. In a detailed review, the institute's report found planning agendas, such as the 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide, with a focus on promoting livability, are in practice tending to favour inner city areas and draining outer suburbs of the investment and focus they need. I quote from the report:

Outer suburbs, which are disproportionately populated by people who are less well-off, have worse health status and would benefit most from more 'liveable' suburbs, but are not often afforded the same attention or potential resource investments into liveability.

The report goes on to make a direct connection between lack of services and poor health outcomes. Regrettably, this trend remains evident in the infrastructure pipeline, as we yet again see precious little being spent on suburbs in the neglected north-east.

I am the first to support an arts and culture strategy, but do we really need to locate everything in the city? Surely we can consider opening a new gallery or campus outside the square mile. When any side of politics starts to talk about big ticket items like building a new stadium, I really do begin to wonder about priorities. Surely, if we are spending billions on the north-south corridor, can we not invest a bit in renewing our public transport system? Think of what we could do with some of the \$5 billion plus that project is estimated to be costing if we put some of it into public transport.

I congratulate the government on proceeding with electrification of the Gawler line, but there is room for improvement in public transport. Why not deliver a rail spur or light rail link to Ingle Farm or invest in urban renewal for Pooraka? These areas are ready for governments to give them some opportunity. I note the government indicated in the Governor's speech it will be continuing with its proposed privatisation of our trains and trams. I for one cannot see how this will do anything to improve public transport for South Australians or for the people of my electorate in the north-east. As Professor Baum's work suggests, the continued focus on ribbon-cutting projects centred around the inner city comes at a cost for quality of life, for health and for social equity in the outer suburbs.

The government makes much of its delivery of a new planning system, but nothing suggests the trend of investment in the more affluent inner city will help residents in the north-east. I am aware that the City of Salisbury has written to the minister about the draft Planning and Design Code noting the engagement process 'falls short of what would be reasonably expected for a major planning reform process'.

I see the government has at last listened to the overwhelming concern being raised by councils, communities and the development industry, who are all concerned about the poor quality and rushed consultation for the Planning and Design Code, by announcing that the process will be extended. That is a step in the right direction, but far more needs to be done, which is why I will be introducing legislation to rebalance the infrastructure agenda, planning legislation and public transport direction. Among other matters, after reviewing the work of the Expert Panel on Planning Reform, it is clear to me the legislation the former government introduced does not align with the legislation we now have.

In my view, if all the recommendations of the panel had been taken up, we probably would not be facing the problems we now are. I will be looking to work with my crossbench colleagues to bring forward amendments to address obvious faults. It might be worthwhile for the minister to note there is a growing movement of people who find what is happening far from what was originally promised. I will also be looking to engage with

the government to talk about the needs of the north-east neighbourhoods, with a focus on how we can undertake community-led urban renewal that improves the quality of life for local residents.

The catastrophic fire season this year has been a stark reminder of life's priorities. There will of course be much more to say about the bushfires, particularly those that have devastated the Hills, Kangaroo Island and Keilira in the South-East. For now, I would like to thank and congratulate the South Australian community for what has been an outstanding response. It is an example of the slogan I have long stood under: community counts. I would also like to applaud the way members from government, opposition and crossbench have cooperated and acknowledge the work of local MPs whose electorates have been directly impacted, in contrast to the extraordinary lack of national leadership we have seen this summer.

Too often, residents in my electorate of Florey feel they are locked out of the political process, that their voice does not count and that, when they voice their concerns, all they get is lip service. Their feedback is reinforced by the recent Australian Election Study, which revealed that, in the wake of last year's federal election, the level of discontent with our political institutions is at its highest in half a century. It is incumbent on all of us as parliamentarians to consider carefully whether and how we might be contributing to this evident alienation and discontent and how we are working to reinforce the importance of democracy and the value of the vote.

Rebuilding trust in politics is far from easy when shortcuts backfire. Sadly, over the break, we have had some examples of this. Firstly, the outrageous moves demonstrated with GM crops continues with a new regulation made despite the evident will of parliament to take longer to debate the issue. In every other parliament, there are measures to ensure this would be an unacceptable way to change the law.

I will be moving a bill to amend the Subordinate Legislation Act so this cannot happen again. When parliament disallows regulations, no minister should be able to reintroduce them just because neither house is sitting. That is not good government; it is the

type of political game-playing that brings government and parliament into contempt.

We have also missed an opportunity to lead societal change in workplace behaviour. Although the parliamentary workplace is unique, we must be models within society and make sure processes are in place so any incidents are better handled for all involved.

I will also be moving a bill to guarantee the rights of travellers to declare fruit to fruit fly inspectors at a quarantine station without penalty. Like many MPs, I have found the important zero tolerance policy implemented by the government to be well meaning yet fundamentally misguided and badly implemented. My bill will seek to address this.

In the Governor's speech, the government has recommitted to the privatisation of the remaining elements of our public transport system, another example of a cost-cutting ideology coming ahead of providing services to commuters. This comes off the back of the privatisation of the Remand Centre and the threatened privatisation of SA Pathology, and with the corporate liquidators running Health, who knows what will come next?

It is, of course, a shame the former government failed to close a loophole in the Passenger Transport Act that enables privatisation to occur. I have been proud to stand with workers, and in this particular case bus drivers, when their jobs and conditions are under attack and will do so again in the future. In my view, all significant privatisation should be subject to oversight by parliament and I will be moving legislation in due course to ensure this is the case.

Ideally, this measure would be brought in as part of a refined parliamentary committee structure, a topic which I note is being examined by a select committee initiated by my crossbench colleagues in the other place and to which I have made a submission. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the inquiry and I hope to work with the crossbench and the government to deliver a vastly improved system of parliamentary committees as a result.

This has been my opportunity to promote my agenda. It is an agenda I will pursue on behalf of my community to the utmost, in conjunction with the measures I can support in the

government's agenda, as outlined in the Governor's speech. I commend, for example, the Aboriginal arts and cultures gallery, which is a project of special interest to the Premier and many within the community who will, I hope, be part of the process of the establishment of this facility.

Also, the proposal to legislate to deal with single-use plastics is a great measure which will eventually stand beside container deposit legislation, and the removal of plastic bags in supermarkets is critical for the environment and truly groundbreaking leadership. I commend the government's continuing commitment to renewable energy, which should rightly set South Australia up to lead the nation and be a global pacesetter.

The space sector has an extraordinarily strong proponent in the Premier. With the observatory at The Heights School built on the work of parents of my vintage, we have an important STEM facility, which I hope will now be better utilised by all in the future. I commend the sentiment that no-one's future should be limited by the suburb, town, region or nation in which they reside.

I acknowledge the hard work of the staff of the Florey electorate office in serving the community and look forward to working with all members on ensuring the ideals in my reply speech are reflected in reality—if not in legislation when it comes into this place, then most certainly when it is on its way through.



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