



The Madness of Bureaucracy 20 June 2006

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): One of the things that has made our state great is the amount of voluntary work put into so much of our life and society. There has existed a strong ethic that we help our neighbours and those less fortunate than ourselves or those going through a difficult patch, for whatever reason. It has been reinforced by the great Australian culture of mateship. There is no way that any government can pay for all this voluntary work. However, I well remember one union official, who was standing for state parliament in 1993, saying at a meeting in Port Lincoln, 'If a job is worth doing, it is worth being paid for.' In regional Australia our very survival depends on the volunteers, and this statement was a shock to me and everyone present. I doubt whether any one of us had ever thought that the work we all did for our communities should or ever would be paid for, but that it was worth doing despite this we never doubted for a moment. However, perhaps this attitude helps to explain why this Labor government budgeted for 1 971 public servants but has actually employed 12 065 since it came to office. This has to be in the vicinity of an extra \$1 billion in unexpected wages costs to taxpayers.

The Labor way of doing things leads to enormous bureaucracies that siphon off funding so that the supposed actual recipients of assistance become beggars in their own society. Non-government organisations have strict accounting laws they have to comply with. Government agencies are not as accountable as NGOs are required to be. Government agencies are focused on obeying and/or appeasing their superiors, especially the minister. Programs that succeed start with the needs of the individuals or group. This government focuses on who controls the money and property and on administration.

Today, I had lunch with the Hon. Ann Bressington, who told an amazing story that illustrates the points I am trying to make. It related to the SOS villages. She is reported to have said that a classic situation was the takeover of the SOS village for children in foster care at Seaford Rise. Although the minister for Families SA publicly takes the stand that SOS handed back the villages to the state, the director of SOS, Mr Ellis Wayland, and the SOS mothers, tell a very different story. The long and the short of it is that, while SOS provided family-centred care services for children, with a solid family structure and routine, it cost that organisation \$750 000 a year to run the facility at Seaford Rise. It cost taxpayers absolutely nothing at all.

Once the government took over this village, it was estimated to cost taxpayers about \$5.1 million per annum. To me, that has to be one of the biggest puzzles of all time. SOS is an organisation found in 132 countries around the world. It is accredited by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations, and it is known for the level of care, the family values and the family environment it offers to children within its care. Ms Bressington had a newsletter that outlined the takeover of the SOS village and picked out points that were relevant to this government's spending. It stated how it now actually costs the taxpayer more money but there are diminished services to vulnerable children. The sale of the village homes, on a walk-in walk-out basis, achieved a surplus of some \$1.3 million over the initial cost. However, the newsletter states:

Financial services are not, however, our mission. Our mission is to provide children under state protection and guardianship with an alternative to state institutional and bureaucratic care—to provide them with a 'mother' and a secure, normal family home and to give them a chance to enjoy a happy and caring family environment so they come to terms with their past traumas and face their future with hope.

We have been reliably advised that the cost to FAYS for this first year of ownership of our village (capital and operating) will be \$5.1 million. This is 700 per cent more than it would have cost SOS in the same year! Or, expressed another way, if FAYS had given us the whole of our annual operational funding to run the village in that year, they would have saved the taxpayer \$4.35 million, as well as keeping 25 South Australians in their jobs and the

children in their supportive and happy village community. What a price to pay for ideological agendas and political correctness!

The reason SOS handed back this village to the state is not, as the Hon. Jay Weatherill stated on ABC last week, I believe, that it could no longer cover the cost of that village. It was because of the requirements that the state put on that village to remain operational. For example, SOS parents were told that they could no longer take their children to the beach because there was no qualified lifeguards employed by SOS.

Carers were put on contracts where they had to be paid time-and-a-half and double time rather than the \$40 000 flat rate that they were quite happy to receive from SOS as payment to be stay-at-home mothers. They were also told that cooking meals for these children was not within their carer's job description, so catered food was brought in for the children. They were also told that, as part of their carer's agreement, it was not suitable for them to do the housework, so cleaners were brought in. I heard that one of these parents wanted a single bed moved from one room to another. Under her carer's contract, she was not allowed to pull down the bed and move it herself. The state had to bring in furniture removalists to move a single bed from one bedroom to another. These are the reasons SOS could no longer sustain management of that village. It was not because it was not a well thought out, well funded operation, but because the state—and, as SOS put it, unionism at its worst—affected its ability to operate and deliver the services it had been providing for a very long time on a worldwide basis.

It would be fair for the average reasonable citizen to ask how this could happen and how this could be considered sound financial and moral management of an ever-increasing problem, given that we hear of children being kept in motels and bed and breakfast establishments because there is nowhere else for them to live. Indeed, by now, the SOS village organisation would have been prepared to fund yet a second village in South Australia to cope with the demand and to work with Families SA to provide care and support for these damaged children. But, no, we are the only state that will not allow such a service to operate freely. It is interesting to note also that SOS took its concerns to the international tribunal, which ruled against its not having to unionise. This is the sort of expenditure of government moneys that causes me grave concern when we know that there are children out there who could be living in homes and being cared for at no cost to this state whatsoever. We hear that we have a shortage of foster carers, yet there was a not-for-profit organisation prepared to wear the cost of caring for children and providing them with the love, structure and stability that every child needs. The story sounds disturbingly familiar.

Of even greater concern is the lumping together of all families and individuals who have a disability. The services required by a paraplegic are vastly different from those required by a mildly intellectually disabled person. Bureaucracy is not noted for its ability to accommodate differences. This is not the way to achieve outcomes, let alone positive outcomes, for the disabled. The first step in solving a problem is to define the problem and to clearly identify the needs. Client-focused services produce results. That is where government effort, expenditure and decision-making should be directed. The Hon. Ann Bressington told me that the money we allocate is the people's money and it is our duty to spend it to the best advantage of the people. I know that we can do better and that we have the political will and the focus. We have seen and heard the discontent of our constituents and the hardships they face, and we require our system to provide the best outcomes. The government services available to people with a disability have to be families caring for as many of these people as possible and it has to be a topic of dissent for years. It was one of the policy areas at the last state election where this government made promises that things would improve.

Mr Robbi Williams is the Chief Executive Officer of the Julia Farr Association, a non-government agency working on disability issues. The association continues with the work that was being done by the Julia Farr Services and he spoke of the changes to the delivery of services to the disabled in an article in *The Advertiser* on 1 June 2007 as follows:

Almost one year on from reform, it appears that there is still much work to complete the arrangements and tell people what the plans are. This means an anxious waiting game for people with a disability and their families, for several reasons. First, it is known that South Australia is not a high performer across Australia in disability funding, and there are no signals about when this might change. Second, the costs of the substantial restructure across the department may have created additional financial challenges. This means its own services may have first call on any new funds that become available. The present reforms appear to have their focus on formal chain of command issues, and the relationship between structure and efficiency. This approach tends to reduce people with a disability to the status of technical problems to be solved, and can result in people being treated like objects or commodities. If these reforms are genuinely about improvements for people with a disability, then the voice of people with a disability and their families must be authentically woven into the new arrangements.