



APPROPRIATION BILL
4 June 1997

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): Given the track record of the former Labor Government—in particular, that of the now Leader of the Opposition—I find it amazing that members of the Opposition can stand in this House and make speeches denigrating the considerable efforts of the Liberal Government and the people of South Australia to clean up the mess that their Government left behind. It would be nice if they admitted that the economy of the State was left in an awful mess as a result of mismanagement and that much has been done to put the economy back on track. In his speech the Opposition Leader stated that at the next election his Party will be spelling out its own spending package and how it will be funded. The people of South Australia and Australia know how Labor Governments fund their packages—more debt, more debt and more debt. That is the only way they seem to know. The people, fortunately, do not want more debt. In contrast, the Liberal State Government has achieved its target of a balanced budget in 1997-98. When I first came into this House, the debt was spiralling at over \$9 billion. The former Government had been living off the credit card. Worse, it was not making provision to cover its future liabilities, such as superannuation, seemingly being content to leave this problem for future generations to deal with. This Government has achieved its target of stabilising the debt without the burden of new taxes and also of controlling the past superannuation liabilities of \$4 billion. The State Government can at last cut the credit card in half.

Despite what the member for Giles said in his budget swan song, part of this new budget is an increased allocation to the country regions of the State. Cheques have already been received for the two development boards in my electorate— funds which the boards will put to extremely good use to stimulate further regional development. On Eyre Peninsula, this may mean the faster implementation of the Better Business Centres concept in all 10 of the council areas that this board covers. In addition, the research centre at Minnipa will receive substantial funding that will help to make it a world-class centre of excellence in dry land farming, as I proposed it should be in my maiden speech 3½ years ago. The Rural Health Enhancement Package is another funding strategy designed specifically to assist the remote, sparsely populated regions. The \$6.5 million package will help to attract and retain medical professionals in rural and remote South Australia, where an oversupply of doctors is not a problem: 10 jobs are available in the electorate of Flinders starting immediately.

I have referred previously to the importance of sealed roads between rural centres and how the Romans got it right thousands of years ago. As was the case with Rome, I fully expect that much more social and economic activity will take place between these centres once the roads are completed. Under a Liberal Government, the Cleve to Kimba road will be completely sealed in 1999-2000, with the completion of the Elliston to Lock road set for 2003-2004, and possibly sooner. The South Coast Road on Kangaroo Island will also be completed. Under Labor, these roads would never have been sealed—and that is by the admission of a former Minister for Transport. The member for Giles said in this place only last week that, when he was Minister for Transport, one of the first things he did was to have an examination carried out as to the level of traffic that used the Lock to Elliston road and where it would fit into priorities. He said that the Department of Transport was not at all keen on upgrading this road, the reason for this being, essentially, that there was very little traffic using it and that sometimes four hours could pass without a car going along the road. So, it got a fairly low priority.

Surprise, surprise! I lived on this road, and I would not be surprised that on some days nobody used the road at all. It was so rough and damaging to motor vehicles that people went to extreme lengths not to have to use it. I believe it was due to the state of this road that I was born at Cleve and not in the Elliston Hospital. Whole communities became isolated because use of the road was so dangerous and damaging to life and limb. I assure the member for Giles that, once the road is fully sealed, he need have no concerns about the number of people using it. Sealing will lead to better contact between communities that live in the region and will lead to an even greater number of tourists travelling into the region. It will increase the economic activity and, therefore, the number of jobs in the region considerably, without artificially inflating the numbers in Government services, as suggested by the member for Giles.

This Government has insisted that SA Water, ETSA, the Department of Transport and many other Government agencies restructure their operations so that they become more efficient. This has not been a deliberate policy to reduce the number of people living in rural South Australia but has been a strategy to provide services such as power, water and roads at competitive prices similar to those in other States and cities. This has all been made possible by service providers using improved technology and introducing progressive and innovative ideas—to such an extent that ETSA, while reducing prices to business, has, I understand, made a record profit. Providing cost-competitive services and roads to rural South Australia will do more to encourage people to live and work in the community than will the provision of artificially high water or power services; that is basic economics.

A Government has a responsibility to ensure that the cost of anyone doing business is kept to a minimum. Every farmer is a businessman. He or she should be entitled to power and services at the best possible prices, not at an inflated figure so that extra persons can be employed in a Government department. To follow that course would see the decline of rural communities in terms of setting up small factories and businesses. Almost every town has one, and they range from manufacturing plants producing farm machinery for the world to nurseries supplying Australia with the Sturt's desert pea.

The member for Giles should be aware of the success of that enterprise, as it is being conducted in his electorate. With the sealing of the Cleve to Kimba road this enterprise will deliver more product to more people more cost competitively. I also wish to highlight the \$3.2 million allocated for the Eyre Highway between Penong and Lincoln Gap. This \$80 million maintenance program will ensure the widening of the Eyre Highway to 8 metres in width and also lead to improvements in the alignment of the road. Members of the Opposition expressed concern in relation to speed cameras, but I heard no mention of the considerable amount of grief that has been prevented as a result of better roads and tougher road rules, including the use of speed cameras. This has resulted, as at the end of last month, in the lowest number of deaths on South Australian roads on record for the 12 month period. It is at least 29 years since the records were computerised. The Minister is surely to be commended for her efforts.

I record my appreciation for the funds allocated to the Wudinna Area School. I had the pleasure of taking the Premier to visit this school following my election to the Parliament. The state of this facility was a monument to the neglect that the former Labor Government had shown to Eyre Peninsula. At the Port Lincoln High School, maintenance was so neglected that the stairs were in danger of collapsing under the weight of the students. A similar situation existed at a school on Kangaroo Island. I also had the opportunity to inspect the Port Lincoln and Kingscote hospitals before renovations had started. Both provide even more evidence of the neglect of country regions by the previous Government which the member for Giles had conveniently forgotten. In spite of the difficult situation left as a result of the State Bank debt, funds have been provided for an ongoing upgrade of the Port Lincoln Hospital. The completed development will provide the whole of Lower Eyre Peninsula with improved health services. I add my support to that of my colleagues for the upgrade of the Royal Adelaide Hospital. This will be welcomed by country people, as many are compelled to make the journey to access the specialised services offered by this great hospital.

I note the \$8 million for the continuation of diversion works associated with the extension of Adelaide Airport. This matter is extremely important to the whole of South Australia but it is very important to the fishing and aquaculture industries based on Lower Eyre Peninsula. Just from one fishing sector alone, the value of exports from Port Lincoln to South-East Asian destinations totals \$20 million. I refer to the live rock lobster trade. These lobsters are flown from Port Lincoln to Adelaide Airport in the early hours for shipment to Asia aboard international flights. When one adds on products such as tuna, abalone and others, the trade will be of huge benefit to the economies of both the Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island. The member for Giles says that the Farmers Federation is disappointed. It is not the Farmers Federation but one representative who has already, apparently, forgotten regional neglect under Labor and the huge debt, which is the reason why this Government could not have done even more for the regions. I am proud of our record in government and I congratulate the Treasurer for putting forward a budget which will once again assist South Australia towards greater prosperity in the future.

APPROPRIATION BILL 1995 6 June 1995

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I rise in support of the Appropriation Bill. Like the rest of this State, Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island are reaping the benefits of having a Liberal State Government, a Government that has undertaken to look after country regions. Even with the tight financial restraints caused by debts inherited from the Labor years, we have been extremely well treated. Since the election, funds have come into Flinders for roads, school building, repairs, special projects such as museums, tourist development, land care and assistance for business and farming expansion and diversification.

The current budget has not delivered everything we want from our wish list. However, \$3.5 million for stage 2 of the Port Lincoln Hospital redevelopment this year and \$6.1 million in total by the end of 1996 and over \$1 million for a Kangaroo Island health centre and hospital development stage 1 were a very good start. After years of neglect, our country schools are at last getting much needed repairs, and to the people who live in the small community of Wudinna, \$1 million for their new science laboratory and for replacing timbers at the Wudinna Area School is almost unbelievable. Another \$480 000 for Cleve's science laboratory shows a major commitment by this Government to providing quality education to the children attending some of our State's most isolated area schools.

In addition, the annual education allowance for country students has been increased by \$100 on top of the \$100 last year and a commitment for a further \$100 next year, representing an increase of over 40 per cent and taking the allowance to \$1 030 per year by 1996. For the very isolated students, there has been an allocation of \$10 000 to the transport reimbursement scheme. This will be welcomed by those students and their families who find it difficult even to afford the fare to travel home for the long holidays, and who would not consider it an option to come home for long weekends, considering the cost and the travel time of eight to 12 hours on a bus. I understand the loneliness and isolation that can be felt by these students, as I was one of them for several years while studying at Wattle Park Teachers College. I returned to my home at Lock on Eyre Peninsula only very rarely.

The difficulties for country students are exacerbated by the exceedingly tough criteria the Federal Government applies to eligibility for Austudy. I want to compare our Government's compassion to the lack of compassion shown by the Labor Government in the recent Federal budget. The 5 per cent wholesale sales tax on new cars will not only hit South Australian manufacturers and their employees who produce half the new cars built in Australia but it will also mean that because fewer new cars are sold, in addition to the job losses caused, even more old cars will remain on our roads. Most country people cannot afford new cars, but they usually try to upgrade regularly to a newer car to ensure that they and their families are as safe on the roads as they can be, considering the distances they have to travel and the condition of many of the roads.

These roads are at last being sealed by the current Government, and I was pleased to note continuing funding for the Kimba-Cleve road in this budget. I was delighted to be able to announce the \$2 million to seal the South Coast Road on Kangaroo Island when I was there a few weeks ago. There is a whole different attitude on Kangaroo Island since the Brown Government was elected. For years its potential had been overlooked, and with the downturn in farming the people were wondering what their future and that of their children would be. However, with the *Valerie Jane*, *Sealink* and *SuperFlyte* ferries, and the encouragement and assistance by the Government with the necessary infrastructure development, the people on the island are looking with enthusiasm towards a future in tourism as well as their traditional occupations.

A total of \$10 000 has been allocated in this budget to draw up a regional profile for Kangaroo Island, to help to focus their planning and optimise jobs, while ensuring that development is compatible with the quality of life and the image they want to retain for the island. Another \$150 000 has been allocated for the KI tourism marketing board, and \$6 000 for the KI tourist office. The future of the island and its people is, in my opinion, now assured. No longer will those young people who want to stay home have to leave if they want to gain employment. New opportunities are being put forward by the community, and they are resulting in increased jobs both in tourism and related industries.

With the kind of dedication and tenacity of the island people, I believe they will take control of their future and we can look forward to Kangaroo Island being a world class tourist destination while retaining its charm as a clean and 'green' island with pure island grown products that will not be bettered anywhere else in the world. Eyre Peninsula has not been forgotten by the Government with \$200 000 being allocated for the Eyre Tourism Marketing Board and \$16 000 for the Eyre Peninsula tourist offices. Eyre Peninsula is underestimated as a tourist destination, and I believe that its potential has been barely touched.

For example, I was fortunate to be invited to open the Point Labatt viewing platform near Streaky Bay earlier this year. The land was donated by local identities Ron and Myra Freeman as a conservation park. The platform, funds for which were provided by our Government, give an excellent view of a breeding colony of Australian sea lions, which is one of the rarest species in the world.

Before concluding I want to mention how pleased many of my constituents are at the sale of the State Bank to the Advance Bank. It would have been preferable of course if it had never been necessary in the first place. However, as it had to be, it has been a relief that not only has an excellent price been obtained, which will reduce the State debt considerably, but also that the branch network is likely to be retained. In the country these branches are not just a convenience: they are much more than that. Their staff and their families are an important part of the communities of these towns. Their loss—not just the loss of the service that is provided—would have been a disaster in regional South Australia. Because of the rural crisis, we have already seen too many people leave and services reduced in the electorate of Flinders, so the people there were

very concerned that, because of the gross errors of judgment by the former State Labor Government, they would be the losers again.

With the State debt being reduced on schedule, I look forward to an even better budget next year, and I commend the Treasurer on this year's budget, which has been a pleasure to support.