

APPROPRIATION BILL

24 July 2008

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I rise to briefly speak on behalf of Family First on the Appropriation Bill. I note that the Hon. Robert Brokenshire will make his contribution early next week, to which I am looking forward, of course.

As with all budgets there are good and negative aspects. Family First is in favour of a number of the measures that the government has adopted in this bill but, of course, we are not so impressed with some other measures. I do not have a long speech today, but I have prepared some key measures, if you like, that I would like to highlight that we are quite pleased with, and also some of the ones we are not happy with at all.

In saying that, a recent survey found that 77 per cent of Australians believe that the government's prime objective (and when I say 'the government' I mean not necessarily this state government but any government's prime objective) should be to achieve the greatest happiness of the people and not necessarily the greatest wealth. Budgets, unfortunately, focus on things which can be given a dollar figure. The more intangible aspects of our lives, like happiness, family and respect for the law and institutions, are made irrelevant if only because they cannot be easily quantified.

Family First, as a party, is perhaps most interested in those intangible things—not that we are not interested in budget matters, which are very important. However, as I mentioned, we believe that less tangible matters are as important and, indeed, in many cases, more important. These are things like defending traditional family values; promoting the value of every human life; supporting marriage and family in general; preventing reckless drug behaviour; pursuing justice for the poor and marginalised; supporting education and the benefits thereof; supporting victims and preventing crime; curbing South Australia's appalling addiction to gambling; looking after our environment without becoming extreme in that regard; and ensuring high-quality health care for the city and, indeed, for the country.

Strong families make life worth living. At times, important things do come down to money, and that is when Family First will take a close interest in budget matters—when they affect the family. I will start by doing something somewhat unusual as a cross-bencher, and that is to applaud the government for several measures. As I said, there are good aspects to this budget and there are things that Family First does not like at all.

First, the government has provided (to its credit) \$190.6 million in this budget to protect children from harm and neglect. Some \$15 million is provided for early intervention and home visiting centres to support children at risk of abuse. At a time when reports of child abuse have doubled in the past six years, these measures are more than appropriate and most welcome. Australia now has some 266,745 reports of child abuse each and every year—a figure which demands urgent attention and, I think, to anyone's mind, it is absolutely appalling. Indeed, last year we had an appalling 20 per cent more babies born with drug withdrawal symptoms in our hospitals than the year before. Clearly, that also needs urgent attention. Therefore, I take the rare step (some would say) of congratulating the government in approving these budget measures. This is, indeed, a step in the right direction.

Family First also agrees with a primary focus in another area of the budget, and that is what the Treasurer himself described as a public transport revolution. He backed that up by explaining that it was the most ever spent on rail. We do quibble with that to some extent because, in fact, William Webb (in the 1920s) probably spent more when one looks at the actual spending in real dollar terms. However, in doing so, he almost bankrupted the state—something we certainly would not applaud. This budget, as far as we can tell in real terms, has spent the second-highest amount on public transport to date in our history, and that is to be applauded.

There is little to be gained politically in budgeting for the expensive electrification and standardisation of the rail network, but it is something that is necessary for the long-term benefit of this state and, again, we do applaud the government on this initiative. We also wonder whether the commonwealth was approached to fund the electrification, given that Perth's electrification

was federally funded some years ago. I ask the question: did the government miss an opportunity to seek funding from them; if not, what are the details of the funding and what is the arrangement with the federal government?

Family First disagrees with certain aspects of the plan, however. Whilst the broad brush of increasing the spending on public transport is to be applauded, we disagree with the specific ways in which that will be spent. It is primarily a plan to bring commuters to entertainment venues rather than a genuine mass transit initiative. While we need rail access to AAMI Stadium and the Entertainment Centre, for example—to venues that are highlighted in the budget—we most urgently need ways to bring commuters to work and ordinary destinations such as their homes, shopping venues and other places at a time when South Australians are reeling under astronomical petrol prices.

In 1882, shortly after foundation, this state completed construction of the enormous Sleeps Hill viaducts and tunnels on the Belair railway line, the longest tunnel being some 377 metres in length through solid rock. It is concerning that over 120 years and with all our modern machinery we will not even contemplate doing anything on that scale, and certainly that has not been envisaged in present times.

Family First proposes that we extend the Tonsley rail line not only to the Flinders Medical Centre but also up the hills to meet with the defunct but still relatively complete Willunga rail corridor and provide rail access to Sheidow Park, Reynella, Woodcroft, Morphett Vale, Hackham and Huntfield Heights. Suburbs in the forgotten and neglected south are crying out for infrastructure. The beauty of this plan is that we do not then need to build a \$51.7 million bridge over the Onkaparinga River from the Noarlunga rail line and will re-use the existing Willunga line bridge to reach Seaford and Aldinga.

If we were able to achieve such bold infrastructure improvements in the 1880s, why can we not do the same today? Let us look at the Barossa Valley as an example. Why should not the residents and the tourist destinations of the Barossa Valley have their rail corridor back? Instead of leasing it to GWA for an incredible \$1 a year for the initial period for hauling limestone, let

tourists finally take the train to the Barossa again. Let the 3,500 commuters who drop off their car at Gawler to take the train to work take it from the Barossa instead. Indeed, I have spoken to many people who would desperately like to see that be the case once again. The line is there; the infrastructure is there; this is imminently doable.

Why not look at rebuilding the Northfield line to Pooraka, cover the new Northfield subdevelopments of Walkely Heights and Valley View, with Park'n'Ride stations for Port Wakefield and Main North Roads? Again, the corridor is already there; it is just growing weeds at the moment, sadly. Meanwhile, if we are standardising the TransAdelaide network, does the government realise that trains can now go all the way to the Mount Barker junction again? Why focus on only one or two extra stops costing over \$1 billion when we can run trains again through the Adelaide Hills at almost zero or very low new infrastructure cost?

For what they achieve, these need not be expensive projects. Perth's comparative 1991 northern suburbs line was achieved at an indexed cost of \$341 million for some 33 kilometres of track and with a comparative 774 metre twin tunnel. I stress again that those costs are indexed for today. The 77 kilometres of their Southern Railway to Mandurah track built during 2004 to 2007 was done at a cost of \$431 million, somewhere between \$6 million and \$10 million per kilometre, it is estimated. It is frankly wasteful that we are budgeting \$162 million for a tiny stretch of track from North Terrace to the Entertainment Centre when Family First proposes we do far more with the same amount of money, as I have just outlined and which will benefit many more people. Outlying suburbs and regional South Australia are crying out for a resumption of passenger rail as other states have introduced. Petrol prices and environmental concerns demand significant and bold action, and South Australians want more than simply more convenient transport to their entertainment venues.

We also have the confusing double message in this budget of a touted so-called 'transport revolution' and at the same time a significant hike in ticket prices. Adelaide is now one of the most expensive public transport cities in the

world, and it sends absolutely the wrong message. On 1 July the price of a single Metro ticket rose to \$4.20 for a single trip. This ticket of course can be used for a period of up to two hours.

I will compare that with the cost in other cities of the world (and I have converted them to Australian dollars to provide a fair comparison). In Adelaide, the cost is \$4.20; in Paris, on average, \$1.97; in New York, \$2.20; in Amsterdam, \$2.20; in Tokyo, \$3.10; in Lisbon, \$1.37; in Athens, \$1.75; in Berlin, \$2.90; in Madrid, \$1.38; in Rome, \$1.38; and in Moscow, an incredible 40 cents. Yet we charge \$4.20 for inferior services while calling it a transport revolution. This budget should also have expanded the fuel subsidy scheme to give some relief at the bowser, reducing the cost of petrol by 8¢ to 9¢ per litre.

So, the fuel subsidy scheme is to be introduced for an 8¢ to 9¢ subsidy. This is, indeed, a significant point, when one considers the incredibly high price of oil at the moment, which is now well over \$US125 a barrel. If the Premier had outlined that the oil find in November, which is mentioned in the media, was worth about \$1 billion at \$US81 a barrel and it is now worth an extra \$540 million to this state, surely this additional unexpected revenue would be enough to provide some fuel subsidy relief similar to that which Queensland experiences and about which I have previously spoken publicly.

Just prior to the state budget, Family First called for an introduction of a fuel subsidy, as I have said, to relieve families at the petrol bowser. It is timely that I speak today, when just yesterday in this place the report of the Select Committee on Pricing, Refining, Storage and Supply of Fuel in South Australia, which has attracted media attention overnight, called for some fuel subsidies, particularly for families in regional areas.

Family First has for years at state and federal levels been lobbying consistently to seek relief for families increasingly crushed by the rising cost of petrol. In the face of federal inaction, we believe that the state government has to tap into the windfall of the South Australian resources boom for the sake of South Australian families.

The Queensland scheme, upon which our proposal is modelled, runs at about \$541 million per annum, based on the 2007-08 Queensland budget, but consistently delivers lower petrol prices in the order of 8¢ to 9¢ a litre below its interstate counterparts, including South Australia, of course. This results in cheaper prices for groceries and other essential items due to the reduced transport costs as well as reduced diesel costs for running farm machinery. In any event, are not South Australian families entitled the some direct dividend for oil exploration in the state's north, to which I have just referred? Indeed, the simple truth is that, if we have cheaper transport costs, we have cheaper almost everything.

The claim that cheaper petrol prices leads to inflation is absolute rubbish. The reality is that petrol is one of the components measured in the inflation basket. If petrol reduces in price, inflation goes down, not to mention the impact on all other items that I have just outlined—groceries, for example. As petrol gets cheaper, almost everything gets cheaper and, therefore, inflation goes down.

I return to the point I was making before about the Premier's claims. On 2 October last year, the Premier used the term 'the land of the giants' and announced that a significant oil find had been made by Innamincka Resources, a find which, based on the then crude oil price of \$81 a barrel, was estimated conservatively in the media to be worth some \$1 billion and headlined as a 'billion dollar oilfield'.

The question has to be asked: if that is the case, and given the extra revenue that is expected to flow into the state, why cannot some of that be handed back to families in the form of a petrol subsidy, just as they do in Queensland? South Australia's constant production of oil, according to the last figures we could obtain from 2004-05, was at some 577,084 kilolitres per annum at Port Bonython, and it will surely increase significantly when the Innamincka find comes on stream. No doubt it generates a healthy stream of royalty revenue to the state government. Surely this would be enough to provide some fuel subsidy relief similar to that in Queensland. Indeed, not only is there a benefit in the reduced fuel prices but also there are inflationary benefits, as I have just outlined.

Turning to another topic, Family First is disappointed that in this budget we continue to pour money into SHine SA and the AIDS Council, which have systematically and continually shown levels of disorganisation and open misuse of funds.

The AIDS Council has used government money to produce pro-drug use magazines, when its mantra is to do exactly the opposite. On its own admission, it refers its disabled clients to prostitutes; it demands that its workers have prostitution and drug use experience; and it misuses funds in other extraordinary ways—this is with public money. Instead of funding being cut and other service providers being sought out, it is actually provided with more money in this budget.

I said I would outline a few areas of concern. The Hon. Mr Brokenshire will pick up on a number of other issues. I wanted to highlight the initial response under the heading of appropriation, if you like, and I have done that. There are some key areas that I am pleased with, in the instance of the increased expenditure, which I have outlined, in terms of child protection and the focus on public transport. I have also outlined some of the areas that I am particularly concerned with, and the Hon. Mr Brokenshire will carry that on next Tuesday.