

ROBERT BROKENSHIRE'S MAIDEN SPEECH
Legislative Council of South Australia
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During the Appropriation Debate (debating the 2008/2009 State Budget)

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The Hon. R.L. BROKENSHIRE (19:50): I want to put on the record my appreciation to all my colleagues in this chamber for allowing some flexibility so that I could bring together my contribution to the appropriation debate and my maiden speech in the Legislative Council. There is quite a lot that I want to say, but there is plenty of time to do so in the future. Given that it has been a long session for Legislative Councillors (unlike members of the House of Assembly) I will try to bring out my key points tonight and follow through with the rest in due course.

The Hon Andrew Evans MLC and Family First

First and foremost, and most importantly, I want to acknowledge the fantastic work of the Hon. Andrew Evans. I watched with interest the Hon. Andrew Evans before he came to parliament, when he was out and about in the south and other areas of the state, but particularly in the south. One could see that here was a gentleman who had an absolute passion and commitment for his state and his values and who was prepared to do more than most people would ever do, by helping to develop a party that could make a real difference in this state. Whilst it is still young in its development, Andrew Evans can hold his head high. Very few people, I might add, anywhere in the world start up a party that ultimately ends up with members of parliament in the state or the country in which it started, and so I congratulate Andrew on achieving that. It will be very difficult to get anywhere near what Andrew Evans has achieved in this council but, together with the Hon. Dennis Hood, I will certainly be giving it my best effort.

I want to place on the public record my appreciation of Lorraine, Andrew Evans' wife. The bottom line is that, when you are here in the parliament, at home is somebody else who is backing you up, and the people concerned are often forgotten about. However, without that support at home and out in the community and the electorate, the job is pretty difficult. Lorraine has been a fantastic supporter of Andrew Evans.

As I said, great achievements have already been made. A lot of opportunities are out there, along with a lot of windows of opportunity, and, together with the Hon. Dennis Hood, I look forward to working with the community to ensure that we give them the best opportunity to open those windows. I first met the Hon. Dennis Hood before he was elected to the Legislative Council when he was out on the campaign trail. I have watched a lot of people come in and go out of the parliament and, given that he had only Andrew and the Legislative Council staff to support him, the Hon. Dennis Hood is to be commended for his achievements and the way he has grown in stature and knowledge in this council in just two short years. I understand that Andrew Evans hand picked Dennis to run for Family First in the last state election, and it was an excellent choice.

I have had a history in the Liberal Party, and I want to say that I have appreciated the opportunities that the Liberal Party gave me during those years as a member of the House of Assembly and as a minister and shadow minister for some of that time. After due consideration, it was clear to me that the party I really belonged to and wanted to put my energies and efforts into in the future was Family First. I want to put on the public record here tonight that I will look at every piece of legislation and policy that is put up by the government, as well as every piece of alternative legislation and policy put up by the opposition, without fear or favour. It will be assessed on merit and merit only because that is what the South Australian community wants: members of parliament who are not locked into a party line, and that is one thing I am certainly enjoying in Family First.

We have five or six core values, core values I have always strongly supported. This parliament, and the Westminster system, is based on a Christian foundation. I am proud of that, and I am focused on those five values. I look forward to broadening the whole of the Family First Party in every respect as Dennis and I work with colleagues here and with the broader South Australian community to ensure that we continue to make this state a better and safer place in which to work and live.

I found that you were always compromising in the major parties and, whether it be in the party room, the cabinet or a subcommittee of cabinet, there was compromise after compromise. However, in a watchdog party such as Family First, you do not compromise the South Australian community for power or in order to try to get power, as happens with the majors. That is one thing I certainly will not miss.

Family

I acknowledge my wife and my three children, Mandy, Amy, Nick and Elissa. It was fantastic that they worked with me for 13 years in a marginal seat, where I was never

home and might have had only one night out of seven on the farm I love. I want to touch on agriculture in a little while, as I think it needs a greater focus by government in South Australia to ensure that we have a good, strong economy in the future. Given this opportunity, I put the suggestion to my family, and they were right behind me. They realised that I still had a lot of passion for South Australia, which I had looked forward to delivering prior to losing my seat in the House of Assembly. In fact, Mandy and Nick, in particular, have taken on a further workload in our farming enterprise, and to take over its full management and a couple of staff at 20 years of age is a great effort on Nick's part. I wish him well and thank him for giving his father this opportunity.

State Economy

I want to touch on the economy because a couple of things niggled me as I sat on the tractor and in the ute listening to radio talkback and hearing it a lot more clearly having left the parliament than I did when I was there. One thing I think needs correction is the AAA rating. The Treasurer has done an excellent job of branding the fact that he almost single-handedly achieved that rating for South Australia.

This has always annoyed me because a lot of hard work was done by a lot of people to get back the AAA rating. The Treasurer did have some positive input but, by and large, if you read the reports associated with the rating, the very hard yakka, and the pain that went with it, was done between 1993 and 2002.

Of course, the media have helped the Treasurer, because I read time and again where they have fallen for the three-card trick of acknowledging the current Treasurer (Hon. Kevin Foley) as getting back the AAA rating. However, if you read the record books, you will see that he had only a little bit to do with it-and I believe that is being reasonably generous.

In fact, I have to say that I am disappointed in most respects, but not all, in what I see as absolutely wasted opportunities over the past six years, in particular. When you are running a business, if you have great income and an opportunity to market your product, you can return a pretty good profit to that business. If you line that up with what has happened here in South Australia in the last few years, there should have been a great profit returned to the South Australian community because the taxation revenue has just been amazing. Home on the farm, I have watched, week in and week out, what we as a small family farm business are now paying per year in direct and indirect taxes, and I can tell you that it is hurting.

In fact, contrary to what the Treasurer says about this current budget, people out there are bleeding big time. There are a few doing very well, but most people now are finding the job very tough. I would have thought that a Treasurer and a cabinet who aligned themselves with the battlers would realise this and would ease the pressure off, not screw the pressure down harder on these families and communities.

You only have to have a look at the budget papers to see what is actually happening with revenue. The 2001-02 budget showed for 2002-03 revenue of \$8.0270 billion, and if you have a look now, conservatively, you can see that this state actually has billions of dollars of additional income, more than was projected over that six-year period.

There is CPI, and there are other things that governments want to do but when you look at the many billions of dollars-and I will talk in specifics about how many in further debate because of the time tonight-let me say that there has been at least a \$10 billion windfall over that period. One has to ask: what have we actually got for it?

As one example, I say to my colleagues: drive down the Victor Harbor Road and show me where any of that additional \$10 billion windfall has delivered a safer and better road for Victor Harbor, other than a sign that tells us how many days have passed since the last serious accident. That sign stirs me immensely when I drive past it because I have been to fatal accidents on that road that occurred in front of our own farm. I drive past black posts every day, some of which represent accidents that I attended, and you never wipe them out of your mind.

I was longing for the day when I would see a proper infrastructure plan and real opportunities and dividends delivered back to South Australians so that we would be able to drive on safer roads, catch up on the backlog of road maintenance and see comprehensive statewide plans for improved public transport that would make a real difference getting cars off the road in regional and rural centres as well as in the city.

That is not happening. Yes, a lot of money is being pumped into a certain sector of the footprint, but most of the footprint of South Australia is receiving very little and I am not just talking about country areas. We see a situation now that really hurts me. I do not mind debt if that debt drives opportunities for the economy. I do not mind borrowing money at home if we buy more farmland, as long as I have done my homework and that will return a better investment, and we will meet our mortgage payments, build up our equity and increase our cash flow.

You do not mind that in business, and I do not think people mind it when governments do it, too, but the Treasurer himself has admitted that the AAA rating is right up the top now. The Treasurer has said publicly that there is probably no chance of borrowing any additional money, and I understand that, by 2010-11, we will see somewhere around \$5.2 billion of core debt.

That does not take into account unfunded public sector superannuation, and unless we continue to address that seriously-and not drop it off budget by budget to throw some lollipops at parts of the electorate so that we can get re-elected-unless we are serious about getting rid of those shackles on the community, our children's and grandchildren's futures are bleak because we have to face climate change and other threats, as well, and we do not need the shackles of debt.

So, the unfunded public sector super debt is still very high and in my opinion is not coming down fast enough. We still have problems with debt with the Housing Trust and other organisations such as WorkCover that I will touch on in a while, and we are now seeing debt go up to \$5.2 billion after it came down to a manageable figure of about \$2 billion. What I would say on that is: forget the government of the day, because all governments do it (Liberal and Labor), although I have to say that, whilst the Labor Party has some commitments to the community that the Liberals do not have, the Liberals also have some, and I see economic management as still being one of the strengths of conservative government.

I would ask cabinet to table the plan and the background work to part of that \$5.2 billion of core debt that it has acknowledged it is creating with the \$2 billion for, particularly, the tramline extensions and the electrification. I would ask for that plan to be tabled, showing how it was developed, including all the homework that was done and how the plan would be seen as part of a bigger plan, as well as showing the net cost benefit analysis involved. I cannot recall the government telling anyone in the community before the last election that it would be putting the state further into debt and putting the AAA rating potentially at risk.

I think it is time, whoever is going to take government in the future, that if you are going to borrow big amounts of money you need to be up-front and tell the community at the election that you are going to do so. People should be told that you are going to put the state back into debt and given the reasons why, and then let them judge on merit. Otherwise, a massive debt is created over one or two terms of government, and someone else is then put in to clean up the mess, and where does that leave a state like South Australia?

Development and infrastructure

As I said, I am not opposed to supporting and upgrading transport networks for the west: those people need it. What I am opposed to is knee-jerk ad hoc planning that does not cover a proper transport and full infrastructure plan, covering new build, rebuild and maintenance that is urgently required in this state. I will give an example in the south and north of Adelaide. After two bad headlines in the Sunday Mail for two weekends, the Land Management Corporation is announcing that it is going to release a heap of land in the southern suburbs, namely, Hackham, Seaford and Aldinga, etc.

I feel for the people who are buying those homes down there. Where is their public transport network? Where is their upgraded infrastructure for roads? Where are their job opportunities? What is happening to those subdivisions when it comes to addressing the issues of water supply (for a start) for them?

I am glad that the Leader of the Government is in the council tonight listening, and I appreciate and thank him for that. I am not saying that it is this particular minister's baby alone, but we cannot continue to pump out subdivision after subdivision and let those

pipes run out into the gulf, when we have a drastic situation with the River Murray, which I will touch on in a short while.

Dual reticulation, sedimentation, retention ponding and recycled water are basic things. I had the privilege of studying that before coming into the parliament in 1993. I went over to Austin, Texas; I went to San Francisco; and I have seen it in Israel: I pushed for recycling, previously, and I am proud of the recycled water project for the Willunga Basin from the Christies Beach treatment plant. However, there is no proper plan to ensure that that is automatically provided when it comes to further greenfields site developments in the future.

Now, all of a sudden, most of the \$2 billion is being pumped into one sector of the metropolitan area. I think the north and the south are going to be neglected and will not achieve better transport infrastructure, because the money simply will not be there for it to happen. I put on the record that, as a young person at the time, I can remember the third arterial road being promised three times to the south, and it was never delivered, and now people ridicule the Southern Expressway.

Social Dividends

I will talk about social dividends to people because, first and foremost, it is about people and it is about community. That is why I am very proud to be a member of the Family First Party: our platform is focused on people, families and communities first. Power and control are irrelevant to us, because we are not aiming to hold or to win government. What we are aiming to do is grow the Family First Party so that we in the Legislative Council can ensure that there is a proper balance to stop the power and control initiatives from working against the best interests of South Australians. The thing that hurts me more than anything else is that at this time (at 51 years of age) I cannot remember a better economic period than the past 10 years.

My father and mother told me about the Playford era, the time when he was in government, and they told me about the benefits I was going to receive through infrastructure planning at that time through genuine affordable housing. Let us get the South Australian Housing Trust back to genuine, affordable housing for those people who really need it. That is what it was started for; that is what the Housing Trust was all about. I strongly believe that the majority of South Australian families and communities have missed out on a time when we should have been seeing a proper social dividend.

Disability Services

I include with that disability services, which is an interesting area. I have to admit-and I thank God that it did not affect any of Mandy's and my children-that I did not have a direct association with a family close to me who had a member with a disability until 1992, when I started doorknocking in Mawson. I could not believe then how many families directly or indirectly had a loved one with a disability; it is incredible how many people out there are directly or indirectly supporting a family member, a loved one, a

neighbour or a friend with a disability. Yet carers are still telling me they are finding it incredibly hard, and finding it incredibly hard to get respite care. I could not believe it when I heard on the radio-and I think the CEO needs to explain to the new minister why the proposal was put up to the previous minister-that they planned to start charging people with disabilities a weekly fee for wheelchairs and the like. I mean, come on; we are not a Third World country!

I look forward to working with people in the disability services sector. I have a niece, of whom I am proud, who did a degree after having a child; finishing year 12 and then doing this degree, and working in the disability sector. I watched them come to her wedding, and they wanted to come to that wedding because they were so appreciative of her commitment to them. As members of parliament, in both this chamber and in the other place, we all need to focus and ensure we have a genuine commitment that delivers the services those people in the disability sector desperately need.

Aged Care and Pensioners

Of course, then there is aged care and pensioners. A lot of that is federal, but there are things we can do when it comes to aged care and pensioners, because they are finding it really tough at the moment. Food prices, fuel prices, budget CPIs in this state as against the increase in pension from the commonwealth; it is just not stacking up for them. In fact, I am talking to more and more families where the children are now having to support their mums and dads to maintain their homes. They are asset rich-there is plenty of value in their homes-but they are very cash-flow poor; they cannot even maintain their homes and have the right sort of food, and their children have to support them in their own homes.

Water Security

Water is a major issue. As a farmer I have been fortunate, and I hope we continue to be fortunate at home in Mount Compass so that we can continue the irrigation we do; but it is not just over the last two years. Even in Mount Compass, when I look at the rainfall figures for more than 10 years now, I have not seen the rainfall that I saw when I was a young person on our farm. We have swamps and springs on our farm, and we are at the head of the Tookayerta Creek system. Until recently that was one of the last water systems in this state that was still suitable for water consumption; however, I do not see those springs running like they used to, nor as early as they used to.

I was at my father-in-law's farm at Pages Flat a few days ago in July, and at one of the main creeks feeding the Myponga Reservoir-a creek I could not get across with a tractor most of the time-probably 70 to 80 per cent of these massive culvert pipes had no water flowing through them. We have a major problem with water in this state. We know that we are the driest state in the driest continent in the world, but it is no good knowing that if we are not seriously focused on addressing water concerns and water issues.

Family First released a 15-point plan on water this week. That is just the start of policy and initiative that we will be continuing to develop. We will champion, in every way we can, opportunities to increase water supply in this state because, if South Australia does not have a guaranteed water supply, it does not have a future: it is as simple as that.

I declare my interest here in owning property on River Murray which I see when I visit at least every fortnight, and I have watched the river's degradation over recent years. I have worked on the River Murray and I was there in the good times in the '70s. When it flooded, we were rescuing sheep from little islands in the lagoons and putting them in a boat to move them up to higher ground. We rolled up all our fences and put them up 20 feet higher, among the trees, because the floodwaters were starting to come through. I have seen the River Murray at its greatest and I am seeing it nearly dead right now. I am very happy to meet with the Premier on this issue; in fact, I have written to him and I want to be multipartisan on this. However, the Premier, as the leader of our state, should realise that the No. 1 issue confronting this state is water and that everything else is secondary.

On a Saturday a few weeks ago the people at Milang discovered that the Prime Minister and the Premier were coming to visit. Even though all the media knew about it, no-one from Milang was advised about it. The Prime Minister was to arrive there at 8.30, I believe, on the Saturday morning, and 100 people found out about it the night before. They went out there with their kids and eventually caught up with the Prime Minister, who they thought was there to announce an urgent environmental flow for the River Murray, to stop the problems with the acid phosphorous soils occurring at the moment and the death of turtles. As a gentleman said today, a turtle dying in the River Murray and the lakes at the moment is equivalent to a canary dying underground in a mining development and, indeed, it is.

When the Prime Minister came down there he had no announcement to make on an environmental flow. In fact, I understand that the reason for his visit was the result of the COAG agreement for which Premier Brumby ought to be congratulated, having done such a good job for Victoria. He has stitched up the situation until 2019, no matter what happens, even if they do find the intestinal fortitude to bring in proper legislation and give this new authority teeth. That is what it needs, because if it is an authority in name only on a piece of paper, then rip it up, because it is worth nothing. Give them the teeth, let us show some leadership from the top, let us gain full control over that river, and let us address the problems caused by the mistakes that we have all been guilty of making.

You do not have a river if you do not have an environmental flow, so let us find out what the environmental flow for the river has to be: that has to be the base. Then let us do some work on how much water allocation you can assure people of having, so that they can properly manage their properties and, following that, in the good years you might be able to grow additional plantings. But at the moment I feel for the people in the Riverland and for those right along the river and around the lakes system.

I was privileged as a parliamentary secretary for the Hon. David Wotton (a man whom I admire greatly and who taught me so much in my early years in parliament) to go down with the Denver family and look at the property being developed under the Ramsar agreement. I have been to Kakadu and I have been to Kruger, and I can say that it is probably not going to be like it for much longer if something is not done, but I urge members to go down and have a look at the bottom end of the island. Get in a boat, as I did, and have a look at what is down there. It is magnificent, but it does not have long to go.

The Prime Minister went there to announce the launch of the green paper on emissions trading schemes and the like, and that went down like a lead balloon (pardon the pun). Sadly, I understand the Prime Minister went there because he wanted to use it as an example for climate change. I can tell members, having known that lake and river system for a long time now, that what we are seeing there at the moment has next to nothing to do with climate change. It has to do with two factors: one is an enormous over-allocation of water right through the Murray-Darling Basin; and the other is drought-successive years of drought, which happens in Australia all the time. Of course, it is happening more of late and, yes, it might be the start of climate change, but do not try to fool the people of the Lower Lakes.

I went to the Raukkan community with the Hon. Dennis Hood. I love the Raukkan community, and it is one of the best examples of our Aboriginal families living and developing opportunities for their community. They were without water for days. Finally, a decision has been made, and I commend the Premier and the Prime Minister for that engineering initiative. The Fischers, as an example, had a magnificent dairy on the Narrung Peninsula. Go for a drive there now and you will see that there are two dairies left. Robert Champion de Crespigny downsized a lot but is still there, along with the Mason family, but that is about it. That dairy industry, had the water system been managed properly, could have been generating much economic opportunity.

Finally, I want to say this about water: I am absolutely amazed that the commonwealth government can come up with an emissions trading scheme that 67 per cent of us know nothing about and do not understand. We know we have a problem with climate change coming and a problem with CO₂, but 67 per cent of us know virtually nothing about it at the moment, yet they can implement that scheme by 2010, in just two years. But we cannot get an environmental flow down the river and we cannot organise water allocation management before 2011. I shake my head, and I am very scared that, if that is the case, where are we going? Every South Australian should stand up and fight for what is right, and that is water.

Sustainable Agriculture

I want to talk about sustainability, and I am firmly of the belief that if you are going to have a sustainable economy, particularly in agriculture, you have to have an environmental focus on it, and industry has started to do that. My own dairy industry has come a long way in the past five or six years-and PIRSA, for which the Hon. Paul

Holloway was minister for a while, assisted very well, and things are improving in those areas. Farmers are becoming more focused on a balance between the environment and their economic requirements.

It has to be sustainable. Agriculture is sustainable. Mining is not sustainable. It is very easy for any government to ride on the back of mining, and I can remember what happened when Roxby Downs first started. I have been talking for a while already and I will not go through it right now but it is on the public record-the mirage in the desert, the book, the whole bit-and now you see the championing of Roxby Downs and the uranium mines.

It is easy for the government of the day. Liberal and Labor would both be guilty of this-do not do much, let the mining magnates get in there, and sell your soul to China and India. Yes, that has to happen to a certain extent-I am not silly. I support the fact that we have to capitalise on those opportunities, but let us have a sustainable dividend returned to Australia and South Australia as we sell that, because things rise and things fall.

Mining could be here for quite a while but, eventually, we are going to mine everything and it will be gone. It might be 10, 30 or 50 years. But areas such as agriculture, done properly, can be sustainable, and the first thing people need, before a roof over their head, even, is food. The world is getting hungrier, and Australian farmers (particularly South Australian farmers) are the best in the world at providing clean, green food, and let us not forget that, and let us support and invest properly when it comes to agriculture.

Workcover

I want to talk about WorkCover, and this might come as a bit of a surprise, particularly to the Liberal Party. I shook my head when I heard what was happening with WorkCover. I was well aware of what was going on with WorkCover in the early 1990s and the unfunded liability was blowing out. By 2002 the unfunded liability had come back to between, from memory, \$35 million or \$40 million up to \$70 million-in other words, it was manageable.

The last couple of years that I was in the House of Assembly, I heard questions to the then minister asking what he was going to do about the unfunded WorkCover liability that was blowing out. At that stage it went to \$200 million. A few months later, in answer to another question, it was suggested that it was \$300 million and then \$400 million. A few years later, the Premier said publicly that it was \$1 billion-a third of the State Bank debt in unfunded public sector liability.

I found it interesting that the minister was left on watch all the time that this was happening. I understand reports were not presented to parliament on time, if at all, during that period, yet the government left that minister on the watch. I suggest that, at best, the minister was asleep on the job. That minister then brought in legislation that will kick workers right where it hurts-not just workers, but also their families. That happened in the mid-1990s and workers lost out then, and we were in a bad state of affairs at the time.

The economy was not booming, the tax revenue was not there and there was massive unfunded debt. So why, I ask this council, do workers have to suffer again?

I have been out with police on patrol. I attended a situation of domestic violence with them, and I will give an example, as it illustrates what can happen. A police officer goes to the back door, another goes to the front door; they have already seen the lady badly bashed; the guy, who is off his head, sees a police officer and myself at the front door and races to the kitchen. What does the police officer do? Either he backs off, calls for back up, risks that person injuring or killing themselves or, alternatively, bolts through the door and tries to ensure that that person does not get the carving knife from the kitchen, as clearly he was trying to do. When I was with that police officer, fortunately he got there just in time. Imagine that police officer having that carving knife ripped across his shoulder. I do not necessarily think that injury would be fixed in four or six months or even a year. I am not just talking about the physical injury but also the mental and psychiatric injury, yet this parliament, thanks to both the Labor government for implementing it and the Liberal Party for supporting it, has allowed that legislation to go through.

Why should any wife or husband say goodbye to their loved one in the morning, expecting them to come home at night safe from their job, only to find they have had an accident in the workplace and that their whole life is totally disrupted because of it? Injured people have come into my electorate office and, if the physical injury did not get to them, WorkCover certainly did. I have seen no reform with WorkCover in terms of its management, its board, or responsibility by the CEO. I have seen no reform in any of those areas. The only 'reform' I have seen is to kick the worker.

I am not happy when I see an increase month after month in our WorkCover account when it comes through. I do not like that, because my input costs are already too high running our farm business. Having said that-and I pray it never happens-if any of my workers get injured I want them looked after. That is not a bad request of WorkCover: to look after them until they return to work. The ridiculous argument that everyone is out there rotting is a furphy.

There is already legislation in place for the rorter and, in fact, I used it proudly when constituents would come to me and dob them in. There is a mechanism to put an inspector after them and they go after them pretty quickly. They did not rot any more because they were not on the WorkCover system. Do not blame the rorters for this. Most people get back to work fairly quickly because they actually enjoy going back to work. However, that small percentage who cannot return to work are broken and their families are broken-and I have seen it. They end up becoming addicted to alcohol and drugs (at times). They are homeless, the kids suffer and the government has to provide all this other backup support, both commonwealth and state. What has been done in this parliament is a joke, and if I get one chance and one chance only to try to turn some of that around, I will.

I put a final challenge to the government now and the Liberal Party as well, which is in bed with the government on this-and I know why: because they were intimidated, not by the government but by others. If members of the Liberal Party had used their brains-and I bet some of them in the party room would have been raising this-they would have said, 'This is the potential ripple effect to roll the Labor government.' Make no mistake about it, I knew when the former Liberal government was in trouble on certain issues. Monitor your phone, monitor your emails, monitor your faxes and monitor the people who knock on your door in a marginal seat and you know when you are in trouble.

The ripple effect could have built up to a tsunami. If the Libs had used their initiative and not got sucked in, it could have been steaming ahead in the polls now. However, do members know what will happen at the next election? It is good for the Labor Party-very clever. They will say, 'Don't blame us for WorkCover: the Liberals supported it.' It will let them off the hook, but the poor worker and their families are the worse off. I say that it is very disappointing and I use that word underestimating how damn disappointed I am.

I say to those families that, when you are injured and all these doctors start to freak you out and all these people interview you, and your wife says, 'You are home for the third month in a row and I am getting sick of you', and the guy says, 'I am going down the pub'; and the kids miss out, the food is not on the table and everything implodes, go and talk to the people who voted for these changes and challenge them. Because, make no mistake, this will destroy families. We do not stand for that in Family First. We stand for building families and communities, and I am very pleased to see that, along with other crossbench members, my colleague the Hon. Dennis Hood voted against those mad amendments.

Southern Suburbs

I want to touch on the south. I have already talked about land divisions, but I now turn to the Southern Expressway. This is a message for all voters, whomever you vote for. Last year, there was an opportunity to duplicate the Southern Expressway-and the Hon. Patrick Conlon, a friendly colleague of mine old Patrick, attacks the Southern Expressway regularly. I had a bit to do with the Southern Expressway and I am proud of what was done, because it did give the south a decent piece of infrastructure, for a start. However, parallel to that, all these other things happened and the growth accelerated. Whilst the Southern Expressway as a reverse road was supposed to do the job until I think 2020 (projected), it is not doing the job anymore because of the growth and the things on which I have already touched tonight.

However, last year, then prime minister Howard made a commitment to duplicate the Southern Expressway. The now Prime Minister Rudd, who was in the box seat to win, anyway-and this is my message to voters-did not make that same commitment. The south has been all blue. The south is now all red. The south is one example, but this can apply to the north or anywhere else. I simply say to voters, if you want your own area's future infrastructure and opportunities to get on in this state, do not paint it all blue or all red, because you will be taken for granted.

I am disappointed that, last year, the sitting members of the Labor Party in the south did not lock in Prime Minister Rudd on duplicating the Southern Expressway. That could have created an innovative public transport system and continued the fabulous existing bike lanes which I see people using all the time and also developed a green corridor. They did not lock it in and, guess what, we will not see a duplication of that Southern Expressway in the next 20 or 30 years, I would suggest.

Finally, I want to refer to the railway system. We should not accept another plan or feasibility study for a railway system south-or anywhere else-because there is already a lot of documentation which is collecting dust. People who live in the south should demand proper public transport-and I will be there backing them up.

Agriculture skills and innovation

I mentioned agriculture being sustainable. It will only be sustainable if we are prepared to make career pathways for our young people into agriculture, like we are in mining and the trade skills areas. Trade skills is a great one. I encourage people to get into trade skills and I encourage them to get into agriculture, but we have to create better pathways, particularly for city people who could become some of the greatest farmers of all time. How do they engage in an agricultural career at present? The answer is with difficulty.

Let us become the food bowl. We started Food for the Future. Two members in this chamber have been involved in food plans which were going really well, but they are at risk at present. We should and can and must continue to be the food bowl. I am a bit cynical on this issue because I know how governments operate. I ask: why has the CSIRO had a budget restraint at a time when we need it more than ever before, when we have billions of dollars in surplus recurrent spending alone and virtually no debt with the commonwealth?

The CSIRO should be instructed to work harder on climate change, but at the same time it should not be losing other areas of research. Currently, the CSIRO is closing the Merbein research centre-which is a disgrace. I have not heard the primary industries minister in the other house talking about it at all. He should be kicking and screaming-so should the member for Chaffey. After several years of joint investment, it has now developed a magnificent seedless, easy to peel orange which is exported around the world. It is working on other research. That has now been canned.

Is the federal government saying it will not address the water problems in the River Murray, that it will be happy to import all our dried apricots from Turkey and that we will not be a food bowl? It must be; otherwise, why do away with research and development sectors for citrus and dried fruit?

Country Health

I finish on country health. I fought for the McLaren Vale hospital with the local people for years. I knew what the hidden agenda of the health commission was, even if the ministers did not necessarily think it was the case. The agenda was to flick the McLaren Vale hospital and put all the services down to Noarlunga because the bean counters and senior management in the health commission thought they would get a better bang for their buck.

Surprise, surprise, after a lot of fighting by the community, the McLaren Vale hospital is still there. It gets \$1.1 million a year from the public sector, from the health department, that underpins all the private work that goes on there, that underpins the food cooked and delivered by the Meals on Wheels volunteers and that underpins its investment in aged-care homes and its future plans for aged care.

Guess what? Some \$3 million a year is spent in the McLaren Vale district because the hospital is there. People who have no better access these days than a gopher can see their loved ones in the hospital. There is not a decent transport system through McLaren Vale. It is better than it used to be-and I commend both this government and the previous government-but it needs to be better. How would a person get to Noarlunga if McLaren Vale hospital was not there? It would be with incredible difficulty.

That will be the same right around South Australia. Some of the incentives for GPs to work in the country will be funded only until 2010. Is that code for getting the Country Health Care Plan through and then we will not be responsible for doctors or we will not need as many doctors because the hospitals will be closed?

I intend to fight with everything I have got to support our rural and regional people. I commend the government for committing to build better regional hospitals (yes, that is needed, and not just for country people, because it will take the pressure off the city as well, which the government forgot to mention), but do not pull the services out of the existing hospitals. I will give members an example. I know a bit about this because previously I was a volunteer, as well as a former emergency services minister. If a coach and a B-double have a significant accident between Lameroo and Tailem Bend, or between Keith and Tailem Bend, golden minutes count.

When people attend to assess that situation, our great medivac with our highly-trained paramedics and our specialist doctors and nurses will get there, they will get some patients back to the helipad and they will be given as good an opportunity in this state as they would get anywhere in the world, but then you have to assess all the patients. You cannot send them all to Murray Bridge because Tailem Bend is basically history and Lameroo is history. You cannot do that, because not enough beds will be there for a start. Who will take them in the ambulances? So, yes, make Murray Bridge a better hospital (I agree with that) so that the second assessment cases go to Murray Bridge and not to Adelaide.

However, the others who need to be dealt with for shock, and that, but who could go into a cardiac arrest, etc., should be able to go to Tailem Bend or Lameroo. I notice that the minister said that he intends to employ 17 more paid ambulance people in the country. That is a drop in the bucket. Do not underestimate how difficult it will be to have volunteers in the ambulance service if you put this pressure on them. I will be watching the issue of police with interest. I love the portfolio.

Police

I am disappointed that the Premier has taken the police portfolio away from this house. I would have loved to have been able to ask questions straight to the former police minister, who was respected, I might add, by police, from the Commissioner right through the ranks. I believe he did an honourable job.

The challenge will be whether the Hon. Michael Wright can do half as good a job as the Hon. Paul Holloway. I am very concerned about police numbers on the beat. 'Tough on crime' is a good call for the media, but we need a holistic approach back into the justice system, and I will talk a lot about that in the future. Illicit drugs is something Family First is passionate about combating.

Future of the Legislative Council

The final point I want to make is about the Legislative Council and reform. When you are a minister you do not always like the Legislative Council, and when you are a government you do not always like the Legislative Council, because the Legislative Council can stop crazy initiatives, policies and laws coming into place.

You do not want that when you are in government-you want to be free and easy. I have been sitting back and watching what has been happening in this state in the last couple of years, and the last thing the South Australian community needs is more dictatorship, more arrogance and more power and control by a select handful of people in a government. What we need is more democracy. We will not get it in the House of Assembly. I sat in there the other day and I could not believe my eyes when I saw the number of government members as against opposition members. It hit me with a stark reality. We will get democracy only in the Legislative Council.

As I said at the beginning and as I say as I finish now: sitting on that tractor listening to the radio made me realise how important democracy is and how important this Legislative Council is. If the Premier wants to try to dumb down or abolish the Legislative Council, we will have a very good debate. I look forward to that debate both in this council and publicly. If the Premier is serious about rationalisation of the parliamentary system, he should open his eyes to the green house as well, because I reckon there is a fair bit of fat there that he could trim, and then have a look at government and governance.

I will talk more about that in the future, but I encourage the Premier to stick by the commitment he has made in the media that he wants a referendum on the abolition or dumbing down of the Legislative Council. I very much look forward to the debate, and I will be doing the biggest road show I possibly can with my colleague, the Hon. Dennis Hood, right around South Australia to let people know why this government wants to get rid of the Legislative Council. I thank my colleagues for listening to me for the past hour. I especially thank you, Mr President, and I look forward, with lots of energy and passion, to working with the Hon. Dennis Hood to grow Family First in the interests of looking after the watchdog capacity for the people of South Australia and putting people before power and control.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!