



Budget Reply

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light): I would like to make a contribution to the Appropriation Bill. Before I start my contribution, I congratulate the member for Hurtle Vale on her contribution. She has covered a lot of ground that would be of great interest to members on this side of the house.

Certainly, I would share and support the experiences she has had regarding homelessness, disability, etc., and that is the sort of feedback I am getting in my electorate office as well. I think it is important to make some general remarks before I go into my contribution on the actual bill itself because today we are going into a seven-day lockdown.

I understand why that is necessary and why the government has been advised in that way and we should support it because we need to get this disease under control as soon as possible for the benefit of all. But it would be remiss of me if I did not also talk about the huge impact this lockdown will have on ordinary people and small businesses.

From the older person who is isolated to the small business person who cannot trade but still has the huge overheads such as rent, etc., to the employees who will lose their work – and often most of them are in insecure work already, those who work on a casual basis – these are the people who will be hit the hardest. It is important that our state and federal governments respond to this crisis to ensure quickly and thoroughly that the burden from COVID-19 is shared fairly and equitably amongst the community. It is important to make sure that the response from governments ensures that the most vulnerable get the support they require.

These lockdowns are for the common good and so our support must also be for the common good. Support must go to those most vulnerable and they must be supported first. Whether that be a young person who loses their casual job, a small business teetering on closure or the person who is homeless, we, as a civil and modern society, must look after those in greatest need first. It is not a time to boost the profits of the most wealthy in our society. That is also a reason we

segue into this budget, because I do not think this budget does much to help the most vulnerable in our community.

This budget certainly does not do a lot to support the most vulnerable in my community in the electorate of Light. When we look at the horizon, the horizon does not look that good either.

The latest gross state productivity figures released show that South Australia had the worst annual economic growth in the nation at 1.4 per cent for the 2019-20 financial year. It was 2.4 per cent for 2017-18, the last year of Labor. It was 1.1 per cent in the first year of the Liberal Party, and at 1.4 per cent in 2019-20 it was the worst in the country. According to the budget itself, employment growth is forecast to be 2 per cent in 2021-22 and then trending down to 1.25 per cent in the following financial years. These are not figures that are going to help those young people leaving school or people seeking work.

South Australia currently holds the unenviable title of having the highest unemployment rate in the country at 5.8 per cent and the highest youth unemployment rate, with Western Australia, at 11.8 per cent. The unemployment rate was 5.6 per cent at the 2018 election.

South Australia also has the highest median wait for a job of all states at 34 weeks, and 58 weeks in the north of Adelaide. That is right: the wait for the people in the north of Adelaide is 58 weeks. That is part of my electorate and those of my colleagues, as is the area around Gawler. In terms of a local response, there is little good news for the local community in the Marshall

Liberal government's fourth state budget.

Looking at the Gawler Health Service emergency department, the commitment to expand the emergency department at the Gawler Health Service is welcome, but only \$2.4 million of the \$15 million allocated to the project is budgeted to be spent in the 2021-22 financial year. According to the budget papers, the new ED will not be operational until June 2024—that is right, after the next state election at the earliest—assuming that things go on time, and that does not look to be the case. Interestingly, the state government has refused to release documents regarding the planning and construction of the expanded ED, which makes it difficult to assess whether additional staffing will also be made available.

An expanded ED without additional staff will just lead to internal ramping and will be of little benefit for patients requiring urgent medical attention. It puts additional stress on clinicians in that hospital. You get them in the front door, you put them in an ED, but there is nowhere else for them to go. That has been, if you like, the pitch right across the health system in our state. I am hoping that at some point the government will have the courage to release those details, because, as I said, an expanded ED without additional staffing will be of no benefit to my community.

With regard to ambulance services, which has been a major issue in my local community, people have actually died waiting for an ambulance when they should not have done. No additional funding has been announced to increase the ambulance

presence in the town and surrounding districts. We just heard that the additional 74 positions the government has now agreed to fund would not be enough to actually provide an additional unit or additional relief staff funding in my area. The paramedics in my region will again be understaffed, working hard, working long hours, risking their own health and, just as importantly, putting local community people at risk as well. It is also welcome news that the government has announced that it will undertake a study to establish an SES unit in Gawler.

The budget does include an undertaking for planning and design for a joint incident management facility, CFS regional headquarters and SES unit, at Willaston, in response to Labor's 2020 commitment to build a dedicated SES unit, if elected in 2022. While the announcement is good news, there is no commitment actually to fund over the next four years. Construction of the SES unit will not start until after the 2026 election at the earliest, based on budget figures provided. I have been working with the Salisbury SES unit for some years to explore the feasibility of opening a satellite unit in Gawler under their auspices. The unit will be initially under the management of the SES unit until enough members can be recruited to ensure its long-term viability. In 2019, the SES acquired land on Gawler River Road at Willaston for that purpose, yet not one brick has been laid to build a new facility in an area of Gawler. The establishment of a local SES unit in Gawler is vital, as the nearest unit is in Kapunda, apart from Salisbury. Having a local presence will be very important in attracting new volunteers to the service and also

protecting the community. A preliminary investigation indicates that a capital cost of about \$2 million will be required to establish the unit.

The North Para and Gawler River systems are known as a flood risk area that floods every 10 years, and so having a local SES unit is very important to the safety of my community. There are a couple of other issues that I would like also to touch upon.

One has actually been touched upon also by the member for Hurtle Vale, but this is an issue that is of a growing crisis in my community and I am sure right across the state, and that is homelessness. The number of inquiries my electorate office gets about people who are homeless has grown exponentially by a whole range of factors. It has been made worse by the fact that now, with booming house prices, a number of landlords are taking the opportunity to sell their properties at higher prices, and unfortunately the tenants are being evicted.

Only last week I had a family of five come and see me. They have been excellent tenants, they have been in the same place for five years, they have a good rental record, etc., but now their landlord has sold the property and, like most landlords, they think it is a better sale if it is vacant possession, which means the tenants have to go. The family of five have to go. They have three weeks to find a new place. There is no public housing, there is no social housing and they have to go into the private market. The private market at the moment is very difficult. The fact remains that at every open inspection for a rental there might be

30 or 40 different people. In fact, an auction then starts of who can actually pay the most rent to get in the place, which means it leaves the poorest and most vulnerable out in the cold once again. The impact of homelessness is often not well understood. If you are homeless, you are not able to look after yourself. You cannot wash your clothes, you cannot get yourself clean and you cannot go looking for work either.

There is a lack of resources and the ability to look for work to get yourself back on your feet. Having a home is the first step to getting your life back on track, and I think we need to understand that as a community. In my case, the government's response has been as follows: to close the Housing SA office in Gawler.

That is the government's response: to close the Housing SA office in my community. Under the cover of COVID, they have closed it down. Now they have taken down the signage and closed the office and people in my community have to go to Elizabeth—the closest place—to get any support for housing. That is treating the most vulnerable in our community with the greatest contempt.

The people who need the greatest support are being treated with the greatest contempt by this government. Fortunately, we have good relationships with a number of NGOs who have come and filled the gap to some extent. Anglicare homelessness services are now providing services locally, and Lutheran Care services are providing financial counselling and support services, but these are basic services in our community which

government used to provide but which they have now just walked away from, and this government's record when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable in our community is not good. It does not help the most vulnerable in our community that we do not have a train service at the moment. I do understand the service needs to be closed down while it is electrified, and I have no criticism of a government doing that, not at all. I think it is great they are doing that, but I do have a legitimate criticism of their response to substitute services. They have improved some.

I must confess that I assume the department has listened to my feedback and they have improved some, but they do not go far enough.

First of all, there are still a number of people who say, 'Look, we don't go to work just at peak times.' We have now a 24-hour economy almost, and there are people who go to work at different times. There are no express services from Gawler apart from at peak times, so those people who only have the GA1 or the GA2 take hours to get to work in the city and hours to get home. These people who are already under the most pressure actually incur greater pressure still and additional cost etc., away from their families and away from their communities. I call on and implore the government to revisit this and see if they can improve the availability of substitute services. The number of people using the substitute service has increased, which is good because they have improved, but I think the government can do better in this regard. People will accept the closure of services if there are reasonable substitute services in their place. At one stage, the government

was going to reduce the other bus service in this town. Fortunately that matter was scrapped by the government.

Now we have an increasing number of complaints about the 495 on-demand service, which is a service that has been around for some time, and has some different names, but increasingly I am hearing complaints about people not being picked up or being picked up late, and that is really a question of resources. It is clear that the model is not working because it is not funded properly. The on-response model is a good model in areas with smaller populations but it has to be funded properly and run better. At the moment it has been late, it is not picking up people, it is not a home-to-home service like it used to be, obviously because of cutbacks to funding for the service, so the government needs to do better in that regard. Just across the boundary, though, in the Barossa, they had a huge trial with the on-demand service and then they cut it back. It is interesting they cut it back during the COVID period.

Again, under the cover of COVID, the government has done a lot of things to undermine the social infrastructure in our communities. In terms of physical infrastructure, there is no money in this budget to upgrade the roundabout at Redbanks Road. Why is that important to my community? There are hundreds and hundreds of students who cross that roundabout to get home or to get to buses, etc. What they do now is that at peak time they just walk across the roads. They play Russian roulette with their own personal safety because there are no footpaths and there are no crossings at

this roundabout. The students have to do the wrong thing to get home. There is a solution, but the government refused it. In fact, sadly, the minister wrote to me recently and said that the roundabout is operating quite safely, quite well—to the horror of the parents and the school community who have seen it. It is sad that the government cannot invest in some minor upgrades to make life safer.

Regarding the Dalkeith rail crossing, for a while it was a ping-pong game between local government and the government, saying, 'Who has responsibility?' Clearly, this crossing is the responsibility of the government because the crossing has failed in between the lines. It is clearly the responsibility of the state government. I have had complaints from a whole range of local residents. It is interesting that they have now had to reduce the speed at this crossing from 80 km/h to 60 km/h. On one hand, they say it is quite safe, but now the minister has written back and said, 'Well, we have reduced the speed now. It's safer.' It is interesting that the government claim, with rural roads, that they can increase speeds because they have made them safer.

In my community, we have had to reduce speeds because the speeds are not safe, yet the government do nothing to invest in that public infrastructure. It is not only ordinary people who use it. The emergency services in the area who use it have complained about the risk it poses to their members—some volunteers—by crossing that crossing at a speed that reflects the emergency. This government is not doing well enough. In terms of rail electrification, as a cost-saving measure what the contractors

have done—I suppose they have to work within the budget given to them by the government—is close a number of pedestrian crossings along the way rather than create alternative crossings so that people can still cross safely. The result is that people have been walking across roads to go that way.

It was no surprise to me earlier this week that on ABC radio 891—on the Jules Schiller show I think—they talked about some of the key issues in the north, and one of the key issues is Curtis Road and the congestion and safety around that road. It is interesting that when asked about this issue in the recent Budget and Finance Committee the head of the department said he was unaware of any issues with Curtis Road—no issues. This is a road that has been highlighted by residents as being the number one infrastructure issue in this community, which abuts both my electorate of Light and the adjoining electorate of Taylor. It also impacts on the electorate of Elizabeth, for people from Blakeview, etc.

The issue is that there is a new population base and new schools in the area, and that creates additional traffic. People also try to access the Northern Expressway and the Northern Connector, two great projects of the previous Labor government with support from the previous federal Liberal government under Tony Abbott. It was one of his last promises before they ditched him. People are using this road a great deal. It is not an upgrade the local community can afford in terms of its council. Some preliminary estimates say that it requires about \$200 million, so I think it is important that state, federal and local governments work together to

upgrade this road and bring it up to a standard that is appropriate. Not only is it an issue of people spending endless time on the road but there are also safety issues when people get very agitated and start doing silly things. It is an issue that needs to be addressed.

What we find in this budget is a lack of investment in the northern suburbs and also in Gawler—and that is certainly how my community sees it. For example, I welcome the investment in expanding the Mark Oliphant College. That is welcome expenditure to cater for the new year 7s next year. However, what has not been made available is additional infrastructure for the additional traffic that will be generated and the additional parking. Congestion around that school at peak times is a huge problem that is raised by people. Another issue in my community in terms of transport is taxis. I get endless complaints about the lack of taxi services.

The government has effectively deregulated the industry in that local community, but what it did not work out was that deregulation killed off some of the local players, and the big players will not come for the small fees, for the smaller trips. The older community, who need public transport services, have been hit heavily by this lack of transport services. All in all, unfortunately this budget has very little for my community to be happy about.