



Parliament of South Australia
SPEECH
9 May 2018

The grievance debate enables members to speak on any matters relating to their electorates, constituents or public policy.

FRANCES BEDFORD MP JP *Member for Florey*

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Ms BEDFORD (Florey) (16:26): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I, too, congratulate you on your appointment, as I have also congratulated the Speaker. You hold important positions in our democracy and I am sure you will discharge them with honour and distinction, with the assistance of table and chamber staff. I particularly want to thank them for their assistance during my time as Deputy Speaker. Thanks also to the Serjeant-at-Arms for her work in the mammoth transition of office accommodation following the election.

Thanks also to our Governor for delivering the opening address last Thursday and to His Excellency and Mrs Le for their unstinting service to the people and the state of South Australia. Congratulations to all new and returning MPs in this place and the other place. I acknowledge all the retiring MPs and those defeated at the election, along with election candidates who were not successful. Public triumph and public defeat are two sides of the same coin that is tossed into the air at every election.

Politics can be, and in fact should be, a robust exercise. It is not for the faint-hearted, but I would like to think at the start of a new parliament that we see each other as colleagues—colleagues with genuinely held principles, values and aspirations, perhaps different from our own, but principles, values and aspirations nonetheless. At the beginning of this 54th parliament, I thank the electors of Florey for their support at the recent poll on 17 March and everyone who helped me achieve this result.

To all the people of Florey, my promise is this: I will serve you to the best of my ability. I will do this by working with all members in this

place and the other place, regardless of political persuasion. We all have a duty to strive towards a better South Australia and we have a duty to work together whenever we can.

My electorate, the new Florey, is actually much like the original Florey first created in 1970. I take my seat in this place on behalf of the people of Pooraka, Ingle Farm, Walkley Heights, Valley View, Para Vista and Modbury North, as well as parts of Modbury and Northfield. The electorate goes from Hungry Jacks at Golden Grove Road in the east to the Pooraka fruit markets in the west. Where I come from, we are good, decent, hardworking people, some of whom are finding it harder to make ends meet and really only want a fair go. When I stand in this place, I stand for all of us.

My political circumstances have changed and this is a matter of common knowledge. George Bernard Shaw said, 'Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.' I am here to help change things for the better. The change I made was difficult. I thank the hundreds and hundreds of people who sent me messages of support and encouragement over the past 12 months.

These last months have forced me to look at politics through a different prism. I was and remain determined to stand up for the people I represent in this place, to ensure that they have access to the best possible opportunities and the best possible services, particularly in the area of health. The people in my electorate are entitled to higher care options at the Modbury Hospital. Selective quoting of reports from eight years ago, factional manoeuvring and all the clever spin doctoring in the world will not change that.

I am immensely grateful to the people who fought alongside me during the election to secure this result, and I am grateful to the new government for making this a major election policy. We all acknowledge that there will be challenges involved in delivering this commitment, but I look forward to working with the new government to deliver its promise sooner rather than later.

There is much to be done in other important areas of human need. Good child care and decent aged care, among other critical policy areas, should not be held hostage to reviews, ICACs and whistleblower legislation. Our society should be judged by the way we care for our vulnerable: the young, the disadvantaged and our elderly. What sort of society spends millions of dollars on a footbridge to connect a casino and a football oval while our elderly citizens sit around in soiled pants, all because we have allowed our aged-care institutions to be driven by profit rather than care? I am reminded of Henry Lawson's great poem, *Faces in the Street*:

*They lie, the men who tell us in a loud
decisive tone*

*That want is here a stranger, and that
misery's unknown;*

If we are to eradicate want and misery, we have to start seeing ourselves as Australians, not just South Australians, Victorians or Tasmanians. We have to see ourselves as Australians, and we need our federation to work better. It took years to build the original federation, and we cannot shirk the responsibility of overhauling it to be match fit for the 21st century. We need to have a good hard look at how we integrate the three tiers of government. The administration of our national affairs should be an exercise in intelligence, generosity and cooperation, not a turf war predicated on cost shifting. We cannot use jurisdictional differences as an excuse to harbour Henry Lawson's want and misery.

Almost all of us here know that want and misery exist in our own constituencies. It is not good enough to say, 'That's a local government issue,' or, 'That's not us, that's the commonwealth's responsibility.' We are all Australians and it is our responsibility. This brings me to Newstart. I am not given to quoting Americans, particularly these days, but Teddy Roosevelt's observation that 'far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing' deserves some reflection.

Those politicians who pay more attention to the problems of their constituents than to factional turf wars know that every day an

ever-growing number of our constituents bring us problems not of their making: problems flowing from cost-of-living expenses, homelessness, poverty and unemployment. They cannot get financial counselling because it has been cut in state and federal budgets. Without financial counselling, they cannot even start to try to get the help they need to get by. It is hard to ask for help and worse to wait weeks to maybe begin getting it.

We know that one of the biggest issues confronting South Australians is unemployment and, as well as that, underemployment. Data shows that there are 770,000 unemployed people in Australia, with only 200,000 job vacancies nationwide. Those of us who actually listened to the people we represent during the election know that secure, fairly remunerated employment was foremost in their minds. Most people want to work. Most people want to achieve to reach their full potential. Nobody wants to send their kids to school poorly clothed and hungry. Most people want to work so their children do not grow up in self-perpetuating poverty.

Starting each week having to live on \$273, which is \$160 below the poverty line, is not Newstart, it is a no start. Earlier this month, we were all lost in admiration for a federal MP when she declared that she could live on Newstart. I have served in this place for over 21 years, but I know that a dollar is a lot of money if you do not have it. In my time here, I have seen dramatic increases in the cost of food, petrol (do not start me on petrol this week), housing, health insurance, water and energy—pretty much everything—but I have not seen a dramatic rise in Newstart.

Most of the people who do not have work want to work. We have to face the fact that, in 2018, Newstart is little more than a dirty spark plug and a blocked carburettor. We should be calling it 'no start', not Newstart. It is not good enough to say, 'Newstart is a commonwealth responsibility.' A 2015 survey by ACOSS should make all of us hang our heads. The report declared that 20 per cent of Newstart recipients do not have enough money to pay for food and electricity, 40 per cent cannot afford to see a dentist, 44 per cent are living with crippling levels of debt and 25 per cent

are deemed to be in a housing crisis—all this in a supposedly First World country.

Ten of our local councils here have raised their voices calling for a rise in Newstart: Port Adelaide Enfield, Streaky Bay, Salisbury, Playford, Onkaparinga, Mount Gambier, Kangaroo Island, and Copper Coast, Clare Valley and the Adelaide City Council. Newstart is not within their jurisdiction, but they have the courage to argue responsibly for a rise in Newstart. These local councils acknowledge that it is not just a federal issue: it is an Australian issue. These councils are in seats held by Independents, Liberal and Labor members. I am very proud that a council looking after part of my electorate, Port Adelaide Enfield, became the very first to advocate for an increase in Newstart, and I commend them on the call.

And it is not just councils calling for a Newstart rise. ACOSS, Uniting Communities, Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army also support a rise. Yes, well, a pack of do-gooder NGO charities would say that, wouldn't they? But what about the key members of the economic community—Deloitte Access Economics and the multinational accounting firm of KPMG? Putting aside for a moment the possibility that these organisations might want to bring humanity and compassion to the argument, I think we can rest assured in the knowledge their argument for a rise in Newstart is based on sound economics, the fact that leaving Newstart at its current level will cost the economy much, much more than an increasing it. It is a no-brainer.

As we start this new parliamentary cycle, I call on my colleagues from all points of the political compass to work together to ensure a rise in Newstart. Yes, Newstart is ostensibly not in our jurisdiction, but unless people in our position raise our voices and demand justice for the least advantaged in our community, what are we doing here? Leaving Newstart where it is, \$160 a week below the poverty line, is neither humane nor compassionate, nor does it make the slightest bit of economic sense. There is momentum for this change elsewhere on the political landscape, especially interstate.

Let us add to this momentum. Let us raise our voices. Let us advocate and let us work together for a new Newstart, one marked by justice, decency and the Australian fair go. Let us add our power and influence to providing better basics in health and aged-care services. That means an increase in real help for the staff ratio for elderly reliant on nursing home care, not just an increase to put a dent in the number of people on waiting lists for in-home packages and a better reporting mechanism for a new aged-care authority or for those on operating lists, where the increase in funding allocation will help with the backlog of elective surgery, or for those for whom denial of mental health services means real life-threatening crises.

While welcome, these tinkering on the edges do not address the everyday living conditions of those in nursing homes waiting to be changed or those unable to get about while waiting for a cataract or hip operation. The time to act is now. The time to make a difference is now. Let us unite and make better basics a priority. We know what needs to be done. Let's just do it.



FRANCES BEDFORD MP JP

Member for Florey

436 Montague Road

MODBURY NORTH SA 5092

Tel: 8263 2666 **Fax:** 8263 2166