

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 08TH JUNE 2016

ECONOMIC AND FINANCE COMMITTEE: EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY 2015-16

Adjourned debate on motion of Mr Odenwalder (resumed on motion).

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:35): Thank you for your protection once again, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to speak to the 90th report of the Economic and Finance Committee, entitled the Emergency Services Levy 2016-17. As has been indicated by the member for Chaffey and others on this side, this is purely a land tax—purely a land tax.

Members interjecting:

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Stop the clock.

Mr PEDERICK: Chuck them out, ma'am.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, we will just wait until everyone has finished. Okay, start the clock.

Mr PEDERICK: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is just a land tax, a pure land tax. What gets me is this: how many events will we have until we are taxed into total oblivion? This is tied directly into fire events, so what happens if, God forbid, we have 10 major fire events over summer? We will just keep getting hit and hit and hit, as the Treasurer sees fit, just to keep belting people with the levy. It does not take into account the valuable work of our CFS, of which others on this side and I are members, or the work of our Metropolitan Fire Service volunteers and our State Emergency Service volunteers, who all do vital work in the emergency services field.

Around the Rockleigh area, about three electorates merge—my electorate, the member for Schubert's electorate and the member for Kavel's electorate. It looks like finally, after a farmer has been basically hosting—

Mr Knoll: I've just got the email.

Mr PEDERICK: You've got the email right there—a fire truck, an old local fire rig at his farm, they will be getting a new fire truck and, hopefully, they will be getting a new fire shed. I must say that I have had excellent discussions with minister Malinauskas from the other place. He is a very approachable minister, and I commend him for that. We have had some good discussions offline and directly, and he personally made sure that I received the appropriate correspondence. I certainly appreciate that; it does not happen all the time.

This process has been ongoing. We are all aware that there have been about four or five very serious fires in the Rockleigh area only in the last few years. With the resilience of the community, and the resilience of the firefighting services, and obviously the aircraft that came in as well, all but one dwelling was saved, and that was due to a sudden wind change. It was magnificent work. I drove around the area not long after the fire had occurred and I just take my hat off to them. I certainly learned where a lot of the hidden driveways were in Rockleigh. 'Rockleigh' almost sums it up—it is a very rocky and hilly area. I really do commend the people who put everything on the line, put their lives on the line that day, to preserve life and save property.

They deserve the proper facilities but, from what I gather, when the department was doing all of this work and found the site for the Rockleigh fire shed, someone forgot to do the native title check. You would have thought, with the number of people in government departments, tens of thousands of them, someone would have made the right call and got that check going a long, long time ago, as soon as the site had been identified. From what I understand, finding a new location is the reason why it is being held up, and I am hoping that work is being fast-tracked because this community, like every other community in this state, deserves good facilities for our volunteers because they have—

Members interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Are you blokes alright? They have had some major fires, but we have seen what has happened at Sampson Flat and also at Pinery with the aftermath of those fires and, sadly, the tragedy of losing two people in the Pinery fire and also some terrible injuries from fire. I hate to think what it is like to be burnt in that situation, as the fire goes over the top of you because you are doing your best and you just cannot get out of the way. I also look at where I think some major blunders were made in regard to Cherryville, just at the back of the Adelaide Hills. I think it is in the member for Bragg's electorate.

Ms Chapman: No.

Mr PEDERICK: Anyway, it is up in the Hills. It was interesting that the planes were not called in. From what I understand, there has been a policy change in more recent years where the planes go up not just for asset management, which is a good thing because they are the first responders that can get to that fire front, whether it is in scrub or infrastructure, and put those initial doses out, then the land crews can come in and pull the fire up.

We had all sorts of excuses why the planes were not deployed, and I think it just got as simple as this: it was a budget decision because it was on the cusp of the season. They had demobbed the planes for firefighting from Aerotech, who I believe have the contract, and the government obviously made a decision that, 'No, we will not pull out emergency procedures and get those planes back in the air.' It would have taken a minimum of one or two hours to get those planes changed over, back into firefighting mode. I know that the pilots and the ground crews would have done all they could to get them up as quickly as possible.

We had all the excuses under the sun on talkback radio about why they did not go up and why they should not have gone up. What a joke! Yes, planes are not the be-all and end-all, but they are a large part of it. I know families who have been saved by having water and foam dropped on their house while they are hiding in a bathroom because they have been caught without a chance to get out of their property. If it was not for the planes dropping water, who would know what the outcome would have been. It is absolutely vital that all of our firefighting equipment is activated appropriately, especially when we see that emergency services funding of about \$290 million goes into this, and the vast majority of this is funded from the emergency services levy/land tax.

We heard the member for Morphett talking about farm firefighting vehicles, which are absolutely essential. I had a farm fire going back about 16 or 18 years ago, and I only had about an 800-litre fire tank. I had the house and shearing shed under threat and, if it were not for locals and the CFS, I may not have had anything left. I have now graduated since that fire to 4,600 litres on the back of an old Ellis trailer built in the early 1900s, and that is a great source of water. You can hook that up to any kind of tractor. You put it onto a big four-wheel drive, and you can go wherever you like. You

have a lot of water, and you can get in place and also pump from that to CFS units if you need to.

People have all sorts of farm firefighting units. Whether they be small 200-litre, 500-litre or 1,000-litre tanks, they are absolutely vital on a fire front for, in a lot of ways, being the first responders and sometimes the only responders. We have had fires where there have been so many spot fires with lightning strikes that all of the CFS were tied up 30 kilometres away. I happened to be on Kangaroo Island when a fire was lit by lightning on our place, and I was panicking and trying to monitor it from several hundred kilometres away. If it were not for the good neighbours who just blew in and blew it out, and grabbed my fire unit as well, we would have had a much bigger problem.

We need to respect all the people in our emergency services. I take my hat off to them all and I take my hat off to the farm firefighting people. As the member for Chaffey said, if you want to make a saving to your budget, and I urge Labor members over the other side to think about this, vote Liberal. It is the only way to go. If you want to save money in this state, the only way to go—

Members interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I might get a new roll of Liberal voters over here yet. You can only live in hope!

Mr van Holst Pellekaan: You can drive his water tanker.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, you can come home and drive my water tanker and I will give you free instruction. But I am serious—the people of this state need to know that if they want relief from the emergency services levy the only way to do it is to vote Liberal.