

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT – Shared Services Initiative
21 November 2007

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:17): I rise today to talk about lost jobs in country South Australia. The Shared Service Initiative, which will reduce real jobs in regional South Australia, is another clear example of this government's attitude towards country South Australia. There are the promises that centralised services will reduce business and service costs which, we are promised, will realise savings and improve service delivery.

This aim is admirable, saving money and improving services, but what is the price and who is paying? With a projected 500 jobs to come out of country South Australia, I suggest that, as usual, it is country South Australia that will contribute these savings.

I have no doubt that there are inefficiencies and duplication in the Public Service, and they are costing the South Australian taxpayer money, but, while we are busy shrinking personnel numbers in the country, city-based centralised services will inevitably expand.

In my electorate, public services in the Murraylands and Mallee are expected to shed 55 jobs. It is easy to sit in an office in a busy, vibrant city and wave the wand over people's lives, but country towns cannot so easily absorb the effects of job vaporisation.

Figures provided by a regional development board present some startling facts. Based on current economic modelling, the flow-on effect of those 55 job redundancies is 113 people dislodged from the region. That equates to \$18 million taken out of the regional economy. If we assume that those same figures apply across rural South Australia and extrapolate them out for the whole state, 500 jobs are to be shed, over 1000 people will be dislodged, and \$164 million will be extracted from the state's rural economy.

This action comes from a government that claims that it wants to build rural and regional South Australia.

Can someone please tell us exactly how this program will benefit the regions.

We are told that savings will be redirected into 'government priorities', the inference being that services in the country will improve, but who decides what those priorities are and what guarantee is there that the savings will not get swallowed up by the system before they ever get out to country services. We must not forget that the quality of service is, in part, a product of accessibility and speed of delivery. There is a risk that we might throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Given that the health sector is probably the largest single part of the Public Service, these job cuts are bound to further thin out the health personnel in country communities. Some country hospitals have already been diligently reducing their costs by centralising certain clinical services with neighbouring facilities. Asking them to find more staff savings is insult upon injury.

In this day of technology, when so much business and commerce is conducted over the internet, and location is almost irrelevant, why is it so important to locate these computers in the city? It should also be noted that many of these jobs are part-time equivalents, and not full-time jobs. A family

can hardly shift to town for two days a week. One full-time position relocated to Adelaide could affect two or three families.

What about single-parent families who are living in the country to take advantage of lower rents, where a couple of days' work a week keeps the family off social security and off the Salvation Army's doorstep? What happens to those left behind by this jobs drift? They have to seek other work which may be quite distant and, with the cost of fuel rising and so many farmers, their wives, sons and daughters also out looking for work to get them through this awful drought as well as the number of available jobs shrinking as services are relocated, this can be an expensive, daunting and fruitless task.

While I expect that most members of the government have no direct connection or empathy for country South Australia, most of them would have relatives or close friends out there.

When they get together this Christmas members opposite may notice that there is a little less cheer around the table and that the conversation after lunch is less about kids, families and good times and more about the effect the government's centralist policies are having in the bush.

I ask the government—and all others who are involved in decisions that isolate people, particularly our senior citizens, from the real faces of those who are paid to serve them—to consider this: people dealing with the problems of others are more accountable and effective when they are face-to-face with the subject of the problem.

The minister's spokesman said the government would provide relocation benefits for those who relocate while also helping out workers wishing to stay put. Buried in their supposedly generous offer is the fact that there are to be no redundancies, but 'we will help you out'. Read that as 'help you out the front door before we close it behind you'.

To think, this is from the party that claims to champion workers' rights.