

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 18 May 2011, Page 2906

DISABILITY SA CLIENT TRUST ACCOUNT

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (20:49):

I also rise to support the motion of the Hon. Kelly Vincent that this council calls on the Minister for Disability and the Treasurer to rescind the decision to abolish the Disability SA Client Trust Account. I commend the honourable member for this motion. Given that she has been elected to this place to specifically represent the disability sector, I would say that she is more than qualified to bring these issues to this place and that all of us must consider carefully the information that the honourable member puts before us for consideration. It is quite obvious that the sick, the vulnerable and the disabled are of little concern to this government and that decisions made purely based on economics will not ensure the re-election of this government in 2014. People have had enough.

I know that the minister and the Treasurer will both use the recommendations of the Sustainable Budget Commission as their backdoor excuse for implementing the changes to the Disability SA Client Trust Account. Of course, that goes to the third rule of politics: never have an inquiry unless you know what the outcome is going to be. It seems, though, that this government has forgotten the first two rules of politics—that is, to get elected and then to get re-elected.

I am disappointed that this government would see the office of the Public Trustee as a viable alternative to managing the money of those in the disability sector, given the reputation that this particular statutory authority has and the fees and charges that those on the most limited income will now have to pay—around \$1,630 a year in charges for commission fees, income fees, etc. It seems that even those who live on the poverty line are not immune from this cash-grabbing government and that even those sick and vulnerable still have some life left in them as cash cows for this government. It means nothing that they are left with just \$28 a week for clothing, personal interests, entertainment, outings and transport. Who can manage on that kind of money?

Apparently, this government believes it is possible and that the disability sector has not been punished enough yet. I cannot imagine how those with severe disabilities will be expected to deal with the office of the Public Trustee, given the dysfunction of that statutory authority that is well documented in the SARC report from 2009. The government response of, 'Well, that that was then and this is now,' simply will not wash because we all know that changing the dysfunctional culture of government agencies does not happen in two, three, four, or even 20 years. No, change of culture is a long and arduous process that takes many, many inquiries, and often a lot of bad media, for even the slightest change to occur.

So, we can expect that people within the disability sector will have to face that dysfunction, manage it and basically work their lives in a way to get what they deserve and what they need, on top of having to pay fees for that dysfunction. Quite frankly, if this state is in such financial disarray, and we are scraping for spare cash by targeting the disability sector, then I question the need for a new hospital or sports stadium until these issues are dealt with. This state is so out of balance, and it seems that every new challenge this government throws at the people of this state can be justified with the pathetic one-liner statements about the global financial crisis and not being ashamed of having to make those tough, tough decisions.

Well, I might remind members of the government that everyone suffered from the global financial crisis, with price hikes at almost every level of existence. They are not alone in their pain. This government was not the only victim, and it seems that the people of this state are now expected to live their lives in poverty and deprivation as this government scrounges for every spare cent that may be in the pockets of the people to build their monuments. The abolition of the Disability SA Client Trust Account will find a measly—and I say 'measly' in the general scheme of things—\$740,000 a year over three years, but the other side of that coin is the impact it will have on those who will simply not cope with the reduction in their already meagre weekly income.

I recall living in New Zealand in hard times for that country, and I recall the prime minister at the time putting a freeze on pay rises for MPs and also cutting back on government expenditure. If, indeed, things are so desperate in SA, perhaps instead of hitting hard the sick and vulnerable and disabled, this government might consider showing some leadership of times gone by. I feel sick to my stomach when I think that this government is so desperate for cash that there is no stone that will be left unturned to find that money. As the Hon. Kelly Vincent said, we all understand that the government must run an effective budget, but my question is: is this really effective financial management? I personally think not.

As I said, I support this motion. I also remind members in this council that, just in the couple of months that have gone by, we have dealt with the closure of Ward 4G, which is going to see more sick and vulnerable people thrown on the scrap heap. We have seen financial advisers from Families SA—44 of them—who will lose their jobs because this government wants to hand that responsibility over to the non-government sector, and it will probably provide no extra funding to cope with that. That means that 7,000 vulnerable South Australians will also be deprived of essential services that could have a significant impact on their life—and now this.

This government needs to put its monuments on hold until we can hold our heads up proudly, knowing that our sick and vulnerable are well cared for. Two quotes come to mind: 'Societies are judged on how they treat their most vulnerable' and 'Societies get the government they deserve.' I suggest that no amount of reconnection or re-engagement is going to save this government's bacon in 2014.

Let us also not forget that people in the disability sector, or their families, will not just incur the cost of that \$1,630 they will have to pay in admin fees to the Office of the Public Trustee but also have to deal with the increase in water and electricity costs and petrol and food prices—and this is before our federal Labor government dumps on us a carbon tax and a flood levy for the Queensland victims. How much can people of this state take?

So, I support this motion with genuine concern in my heart for all those with a disability who will be forced to live a life of further deprivation because we have a government that would have difficulty even balancing a household budget, let alone being able to meet the basic needs of the people of this state.