



Amanda Rishworth MP

Member for Kingston

Appropriation Bill (No 1) 28 May 2008

I am very pleased to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2008-2009 and the related budget bills. Clement Attlee, a Labour Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, once said that a government's budget was a natural expression of its character. This is particularly the case in times of economic turbulence. While the previous government reaped the rewards of the Keating government's tough economic reform and unprecedented growth in international financial markets, the Rudd government is not so lucky. With rising inflation and instability in global financial markets, it is important that this government strike the right balance with this budget—and indeed it has. This budget clearly identifies that the priorities of this government are to focus long term on building the infrastructure that Australia needs while delivering real assistance to those doing it tough in our community.

Over the last decade the previous government ignored more than 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank of Australia about the pressure that rising inflation was putting on interest rates. Yet, from his recent comments reported in the media, it seems that the member for Wentworth still is not certain whether inflation is an issue for Australian working families. I have certainly got news for him. Particularly in the outer metropolitan areas like my electorate of Kingston, rising inflation is hurting families through higher interest rates and higher prices at the supermarket. Lower inflation means lower interest rates and lower costs for families. Unlike the budgets that have been delivered in the House over the last few years, this budget makes the tough decisions that are necessary to cut spending and put downward pressure on inflation.

In addition, this government has not lost sight of investing in the future, establishing three funds with which it will expand productive capacity in our economy: the Health and Hospitals Reform Fund, the Education Investment Fund and the Building Australia Fund. Constituents in my electorate of Kingston have warmly welcomed the \$20 billion Building Australia Fund, which will invest in ongoing improvements to roads, ports, railways and telecommunications infrastructure. The growing suburbs of southern metropolitan Adelaide are looking forward to a decent Commonwealth investment in infrastructure—investment that was not provided by the previous federal government.

Already in this budget, the Rudd government have invested in local infrastructure in the southern area of Adelaide. Firstly, we have begun

delivering on our promise of a \$7.5 million upgrade to one of South Australia's worst intersections: the Victor Harbor and Main South Road intersection. This will prevent the multitude of accidents and near misses that occur every year. In addition, there is a \$6.74 million investment in black spot funding for both the Onkaparinga and Marion councils, which will also help to improve the safety of the roads in Kingston.

Aldinga Beach and Port Willunga are two of the fastest growing areas in South Australia, with many new families moving in every month. Unfortunately, while the beaches are beautiful and safe for swimmers, there is currently a dearth of infrastructure for sport and recreation on dry land. At the election, the government committed \$2 million to help the council build a recreation centre in this area, and I am very pleased that this government has delivered on this commitment. In addition, to support the new recreation centre the government has also invested \$100,000 to upgrade the Onkaparinga Rugby Union Football Club.

Investing in our universities is also critical to ensure that we are able to turn the tide on the current skills crisis facing this country. In this budget, an extra \$8 million was provided to the Flinders University of South Australia for capital expenditure. This investment will ensure that the university can continue to be an example of education excellence in the southern Adelaide area. In addition, this budget delivered on our election commitment of a \$10 million upgrade to improve the medical training facilities at the Flinders Medical Centre, Noarlunga Hospital and the repatriation hospital, allowing for greater capacity for the Flinders medical school to train more doctors in the southern suburbs of Adelaide.

The closure of the Mitsubishi plant at Tonsley Park has affected many people in the south. As I told the House in my first speech, the pain of losing one's employment extends not only to the loss of income; for many of these workers at Mitsubishi, much of their identity was woven into the pride they took from being part of a team that worked together to build quality cars. However, now we must look to the future, and this budget delivers a \$35 million innovation and investment package. This will be provided over four years. It will provide intensive assistance to Mitsubishi workers and will create a South Australian innovation and investment fund. This fund will focus on the Adelaide southern suburbs and will be directed at projects that diversify and strengthen the capacity of South Australia's manufacturing and industry sector.

In addition, this budget has delivered \$900,000 to help the Southern Success Business Enterprise Centre expand the array of services it provides to local small business. This extra assistance will be welcomed by the many small businesses in the southern suburbs of Adelaide.

All these investments that I have described are clearly aimed at investing in the long-term future of the southern suburbs of Adelaide. As I go around the electorate of Kingston, families are telling me that they are pleased with our focus of investing in the future but they also need immediate support to ensure that they are able to make ends meet. This budget delivers the \$55 billion Working Families Support Package, targeted to provide some relief for

these families. This budget delivers tax relief of over \$20 per week to a taxpayer on average weekly earnings and adjusts the low-income tax offset so that taxpayers earning less than \$14,000 a year pay no tax at all. These tax cuts reward families who are putting in the hard yards to drive Australia's economic prosperity and ensure that there is still incentive in our tax system for wage earners at the higher end.

Another key tax measure in this budget was to remove the Medicare levy surcharge tax slug off the back of middle-income earners. When this measure was introduced by the Howard government on 1 July 1997, the surcharge was imposed on only eight per cent of taxpayers. Without the increase of the threshold in this budget, the Medicare surcharge would have been imposed on 45 per cent of taxpayers. I challenge the opposition to find a single person earning \$50,000 a year who feels they are a high-income earner and should be penalised if they do not take out private health insurance. It appears that it is the policy of those opposite to fight tooth and nail to stop this measure for tax relief for middle-income earners while opposing a small increase in the luxury car tax. This exposes the true loyalties of the coalition, who are not here for working families but for the wealthy elite, who can afford cars that cost more than most people earn in a year.

One of the most substantial pressures on families with school-aged children is expenses relating to education. The government's new education tax refund will provide families receiving family tax benefit A with a 50 per cent refund for many education expenses, up to \$750 per year for each child undertaking primary studies and up to \$1,500 per year for each child undertaking secondary studies. This refund will aid many families in Kingston with the increasing cost of educational materials such as computer equipment and access to the internet. For families with kids at primary and secondary school, having a computer at home is not a luxury; it is a necessity. This measure is important—to make a computer in every home not an unattainable dream but a reality.

Age pensioners have made an immeasurable contribution to our nation. Many worked for four decades or more to support their families. Unfortunately, most age pensioners worked at a time when superannuation schemes for average-income earners were inadequate, if they existed at all. Age pensioners are doing it tough, particularly single pensioners, who are often older women whose husbands have passed away. I have met many pensioners around my electorate who are struggling to afford the basic essentials of life—food, housing, medicine and new clothes. This budget delivers an extra \$392 per year to recipients of the utilities allowance and has also delivered a bonus to seniors of \$500. Together, this means that age pensioners are at least \$892 better off per annum than was projected by the previous government in their forward estimates. The measures to help pensioners are only the first step and the government recognises that there is still more to do to make sure that age pensioners can enjoy a comfortable retirement. I look forward to the report from the Henry review into Australia's tax and welfare system, which will include recommendations to help improve the living standards of pensioners.

Carers play one of the most important roles in our community. They sacrifice their own personal gain to look after someone they love. The government has recognised their contribution to our community with an extra \$822 million package to make their lives easier. This includes a \$1,000 one-off bonus to recipients of the carers payment and DVA carers service pension and, to recipients of the carers allowance, a \$600 bonus for each eligible care receiver. The budget also includes \$100 million for extra capital funding to increase the supply of supported accommodation for people with a disability whose ageing parents can no longer look after them at home.

In summary, the budget delivers on the government's election commitments. It is a natural expression of this government's character. It has made one matter entirely clear: under the Rudd government, there is no such thing as core and non-core promises. When this government makes a commitment to the Australian people, it means it. The government is proud that this budget reflects not only its sound economic management but its honesty and integrity with the electorate and its compassion to those in need. I commend this legislation to the House