



REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:15): I will speak against this motion, because it is just a nonsense. I will not outline the government's achievements in regional and rural Australia; the member for Mawson has done that, and 10 minutes would not be enough. However, I would like to highlight some of the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party when it pretends to stand up for rural and regional Australia.

One of the Liberal Party's chances to stand up for regional Australia was in the Economic and Finance Committee, to support it in its inquiry into warranty issues regarding farm machinery. Every Liberal on that committee opposed it. That is how they show they are standing up for rural and regional Australia. I can tell the house that all the Liberal voters in my electorate know about it—and they are really happy with the Liberal Party; they think it is a really smart idea to vote against the inquiry!

Mr Venning: Right issue, wrong place for it.

Mr PICCOLO: Wrong issue, wrong place. In fact, the Liberal Party members said that it was a trivial matter not worthy of the committee's consideration.

Mr Venning interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: Not worthy of our committee's consideration—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Light! The member for Schubert will remain in his seat while another member is speaking.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: I rise on a point of order. The member for Schubert stood up in an aggressive manner, attacking the member for Light and claiming that he was provoked when he was not provoked. He is being exceptionally disorderly and I ask that he apologise to the member for Light immediately.

Members interjecting:

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr PICCOLO: As I said, the Liberal Party members on our committee said that the matter was too trivial and not important enough for the committee to consider. That is what they think about the farmers in our community. Then they went public and tried to justify what they did; they tried to shift the blame, saying that the Labor Party members opposed an inquiry into land tax. In fact, when they went out publicly they talked about tax reform generally—and I will get to that and to what they said.

This is how the Liberal Party demonstrates its support for rural and regional Australia. It opposes an inquiry designed to find out what is happening on the farms and how the machinery issue is impacting on the viability and productivity of farms. Wrong issue, wrong place the member for Schubert said.

Mr Venning: Right issue, wrong place.

Mr PICCOLO: Well, I say that it is the right issue, right place to discuss it, because we care about rural and regional Australia. In that same committee meeting the Liberal Party pulled a stunt, as it usually does, and put up a motion regarding land tax reform—just land tax. It is important to note the difference, because what it said publicly was quite different. They put this motion, and it was just a political motion, given that we had only a few months left of sittings. It wanted to reform the whole land tax and the whole taxation system in a few hearings. It was a stunt, and they went out publicly with that.

That is fine, I can live with that, but within a fortnight the Liberal Party announced its land tax policy. So it was a stunt. Either it was not going to wait for an inquiry before it announced its policy or the member for Waite, in the committee, had no idea his party was forming a policy—which is probably more accurate. Liberal Party members have difficulty communicating with each other; they speak to other parties and other people, but not to each other. I know that the member for Schubert and the member for Hammond are quite embarrassed by their colleagues on the committee, because they voted for the farm machinery reference. They went out of their way to distance themselves from their colleagues—and I am not surprised; I can understand that, as most of them do. I do not have to be distanced from my colleagues because I support what my colleagues do on this side.

However, what is more important is the land tax reform issue. The government and the Treasurer have said that; in fact, the Treasurer is on record as saying that he would like to do more to reduce the land tax burden in South Australia if we could afford to do that as a state. The Liberal Party decides to have all these cuts in taxes but what it has not mentioned—but what the voters know—is the matter of any cuts in expenditure.

Mr Bignell: Smoke and mirrors.

Mr PICCOLO: Exactly. Some farmers came to see me in my electorate office this week, and they were all talking about land tax. I said, 'You've got a legitimate issue. It has to be addressed, and it will be addressed when the state can afford to do so. The Liberal Party is offering this,' and they said, 'We don't believe them.' These are farmers. This is your natural constituency. Your record speaks for itself.

You had a lame policy last time. When you do get a chance to support your rural people, you do not in committee and then go out in public and say all sorts of things. You do not have any credibility. As your federal member said, the Liberal brand is not worth a cracker at the moment. The Liberal brand is just not worth it, and that is why, in rural and regional Australia, Independents and regional candidates are popping up—the Liberal Party does not represent their interests.

Mr Kenyon: They're going backwards.

Mr PICCOLO: They are going backwards. Look at Frome, which is a classic example of where the Liberal Party got it so wrong. At the next election, I am quite happy to compare this government's record with that of the Liberal Party. I am happy to compare what we do and say with what it did and what it says it will do.

The member for Schubert raises shared services and the impact on the regions. Talk to the country communities about the impact on regions when they privatised SA Water, when they privatised ETSA, etc., with the reduction in public utilities in those communities, what happened then? The member for Schubert says nothing because he knows that the impact on those communities was devastating. He sat there quietly while his Liberal government did it. Where was he at the time to speak out for regional and rural Australia?

It is hypocrisy for the Liberal Party to say that it is concerned about small communities and the impact on them of the reduction in public services—because they did it, they led the way on it and they are the masters of it. With those comments, I oppose this motion.