



liberal thinking

a community newsletter from Senator Simon Birmingham

LIBERALS' URGENT RELIEF FOR PENSIONERS BLOCKED

Liberals have been fighting hard to deliver urgent relief for pensioners and other Australians struggling with the rising cost of groceries, housing and pharmaceuticals.

As an initial measure, Liberal Party legislation giving an immediate increase to the single age pension passed the Senate, only to be refused by the Rudd Labor Government in an amazing display of contempt for senior Australians.

With the Prime Minister admitting he could not live on the single age pension rate of \$273 a week, it defies logic that he insists people must wait until yet another review is completed. While the government has caved to pressure by offering one-off bonuses to pensioners and carers, what happens when that money runs out?

Australia's pensioners, carers and retirees need long term solutions, not just short term handouts. Labor's policies are already putting pressure on the prices of private health insurance and hospital waiting lists.

Many Australians have also watched their savings or superannuation base erode this year. People need help now, not later, and certainly not after another bureaucratic review process.



CHALLENGING TIMES

To say we live in uncertain times may be clichéd, but it is nonetheless true. The turmoil that has hit financial markets around the world also poses a threat to our economic security.

Over the previous decade we faced other challenges, such as the Asian economic crisis and uncertainty following the 2001 terrorist attacks, but strong leadership from the then Liberal Government ensured continued growth.

Malcolm Turnbull has offered bipartisan cooperation from the Liberal team to help Australia through these latest challenges. Malcolm brings a wealth of economic experience that I hope the Government will seek out.

Just as Christmas is a time for many families to come together, the New Year is an opportunity to focus on new opportunities. I wish you a joyous festive season and look forward to working for our community in the year ahead.

Best wishes

Simon

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MALCOLM TURNBULL TAKES CHARGE

In September this year Malcolm Turnbull was elected leader of the Liberal Party. Malcolm is a man of great knowledge and drive and will serve the people of Australia well. Malcolm brings a very welcome fresh and progressive approach to take the Liberal Party and Australia into the future.

Malcolm's capacity and leadership has been on clear display during the current financial crisis. He instils a confidence in those around him that Australia needs.

I have the pleasure of working closely with Malcolm on a range of issues, especially the water policy issues surrounding the River Murray where he initiated and led national reform measures. Malcolm has visited South Australia on several occasions this year and is fully engaged in the issues facing our state.



Simon talking to community volunteers with Senator Fisher and Malcolm Turnbull

A COMPUTER FOR EVERY SCHOOL STUDENT? NOT ANY MORE!!

Kevin Rudd's promise of a laptop for every school student has crashed and burned and now even the follow up promise of a computer for every secondary school student has been scrapped.

There may be some funds for computers, but there is **no money for IT support or software**. Rather than being an education revolution, State Labor Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith let the cat out of the bag

saying that funds for new computers would actually be used to replace existing ones. They won't even be providing additional computers!

The *Computers in Schools* program has largely ended up being about replacing existing computers, with **no money for support and no money for software**. Few schools have seen any actual increase in the number of computers available for students to use. So much for the education revolution...

What Labor MPs really think of the Education Revolution:

"Hardly a revolution"

Julia Irwin, Labor MP, House of Representatives,
20 October 2008

"These are replacement computers."

"I reiterate that these are replacement computers"

Jane Lomax-Smith, State Labor Minister,
Budget Estimates,
27 June 2008



WHY IS LABOR PIPING WATER TO MELBOURNE?

While South Australian farmers and irrigators continue to face huge challenges and the slow death of our Lower Lakes creeps closer, the Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, has approved Victorian Labor's plan to rip up to 110 billion litres of water from the Murray system to pipe to Melbourne.

It is clear the Government has no coherent plan to save Murray communities and the Lower Lakes. It defies logic that in the same week the Water Minister is buying farms for environmental flows, the Environment Minister is supporting the diversion of billions of litres of water to Melbourne!

The North-South Pipeline is an extreme act of environmental vandalism and highlights Labor's lack of will to take the decisive action South Australians have been calling for. It strikes of a dirty deal to keep Kevin Rudd's Victorian Labor mates sweet!



ACTION NEEDED NOW FOR MURRAY

I have witnessed first hand the struggles of Murray River and Lower Lakes communities during numerous meetings and visits. As South Australians are acutely aware, the current situation is largely the result of a lack of rainfall and a systemic over allocation of water in the basin.

This pain is being exacerbated as Labor Governments bicker with each other and drag their feet on essential projects. They must act now to fast track neglected infrastructure projects capable of saving billions of litres of water, revoke approval for the North-South Pipeline and secure unconditional national management of the Murray system.

Many people ask what they can do to help struggling river communities. In addition to being water wise at home and keeping pressure on politicians to act, buying local produce, visiting the river and Lower Lakes is a great way to show support. A visit to the Riverland, Murraylands or Lower Lakes areas will support struggling small businesses, restaurants and stores – why not take a trip next weekend?



Simon listening to the concerns of communities at the Save the Murray rally at Parliament House in Adelaide

DOING MORE FOR

PENSIONERS FORCED TO WAIT

I support the one off payments for pensioners and carers – the relief from increasing costs of living was clearly overdue. What I don't support is Kevin Rudd telling pensioners that they need to wait for increased pensions. Wait for yet another review. Wait for months while the cost of living continues to soar. Perhaps even wait until the budget next year or beyond. All while he and his senior Ministers admit they could not live on the pension!

What happens after the one-off payment? Answer – the pension rate will still be the same as it is

today. Australians in need deserve a solid plan to increase pensions, one that provides real, long term relief.

In addition to increasing the pension now, Liberals want to change the method of indexation to include a Living Cost Index for Age Pensioner Households, better reflecting the real costs facing pensioners. These clear plans from the Liberal Party stand in stark contrast to Labor's buck passing.

MEAN CUT TO VETERANS PENSION

In the 2008 budget Labor flagged changes to the Partner Service Pension. These include changes that would strip people of their entitlements if they separate from their veteran partner for more than 12 months.

These are people who supported our veterans while they served our country in war. Many have endured years of hardship, helping their veteran spouses deal with the emotional and physical legacies of their service.

This mean change will force partners onto welfare, which in most cases will be the aged pension. The Liberals do not support this policy as it simply moves people from a dedicated entitlement to welfare. We believe veterans and their families deserve better.

AUSTRALIA-GREECE SOCIAL SECURITY AGREEMENT



The new Social Security agreement between Australia and Greece, negotiated by the previous Liberal Government, has come into effect. Now former residents of Australia living in Greece, and former residents of Greece living in Australia, may be able to access the pension in their home country or in both countries.

For further information or to obtain the Greek old age pension claim pack please contact Centrelink International Services on 13 16 73.

OLDER AUSTRALIANS

LONGER HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS HIGHER HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Labor's changes to the Medicare Levy Surcharge have put even more pressure on families and the elderly. More pressure on top of higher petrol prices, higher grocery prices and a higher cost of living.

Hundreds of thousands of Australians are expected to drop

out of private health insurance, leading to longer hospital waiting lists and higher health insurance premiums. This bungled Labor policy will hurt everyone.

New figures show 700,000 are expected to leave private system

Health fund bungle

Herald Sun 5/6/08



PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT

The Australian Bankers' Association (ABA) has produced a new information booklet to help people with retirement. To obtain your free copy call the ABA on (02) 8298 0450 or visit www.bankers.asn.au

The National Information Centre on Retirement Investments (NICRI) provides information on how to select a financial planner, superannuation and different types of investment. Visit <http://moneymap.nicri.org.au> or call the NICRI on 1800 020 110.

To find out if you are eligible to receive the Age Pension or other forms of assistance visit www.centrelink.gov.au and download the retirement payments rates fact sheet, or call the Centrelink retirement hotline on 132 300.



SENIORS PETITION

Feedback from my previous newsletter led me to start a petition of older South Australians calling for the Rudd Government to urgently review the level of all aged pensions and allowances to ensure that seniors have a reasonable standard of living. I was very happy to receive hundreds of signatures!

Liberal Members and Senators from around the country will jointly present to the Federal Parliament petitions from thousands of Australians calling for action on pensions .



BLOOD DONORS WANTED

In Australia 21,000 people require blood donations every week, and 80 per cent of us will require a blood transfusion at some stage in our life.

Blood stocks frequently reach dangerous lows, especially in holiday seasons. New donors are always needed to ensure hospitals have adequate stocks of blood.



Simon donating blood at Adelaide's Pirie Street Blood Bank

Becoming a blood donor could help save up to three lives. For more information, or to make an appointment, call the Red Cross on 13 14 95 or visit www.redcross.org.au

GET IN2CRICKET!

Cricket Australia has launched its new in2CRICKET Program to get more boys and girls participating in cricket this summer.

Families can find in2CRICKET centres throughout SA, including at Glandore, Glenelg, Marion, Prospect and Brighton. For more information or to find your nearest in2CRICKET centre visit www.in2CRICKET.com.au

DO YOU KNOW THE SIGNS OF STROKE? ACT FAST

- F Facial weakness** – can the person smile? Has their mouth or eyes drooped?
- A Arm Weakness** – Can the person raise both arms?
- S Speech Difficulty** – Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- T Time to act FAST** – If you recognise the signs of stroke, seek immediate medical attention.

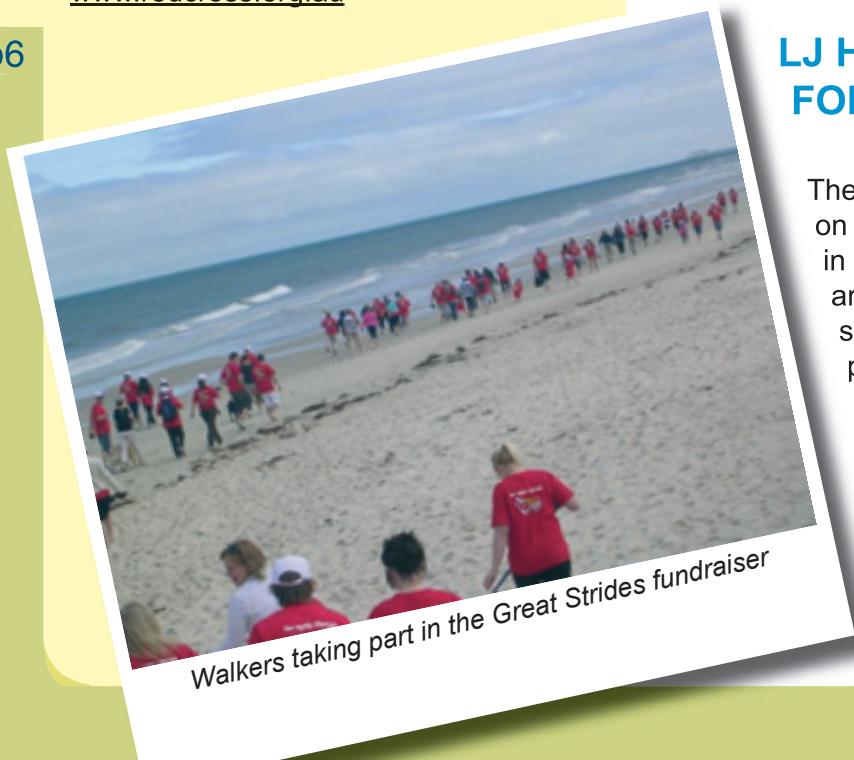
Call 000

For further information on stroke visit www.strokefoundation.com.au

LJ HOOKER GREAT STRIDES WALK FOR CYSTIC FIBROSIS

The 2008 Great Strides walk took place at Henley Beach on Sunday 19 October. More than 100 people took part in the walk to Grange and back, joining walkers from around the country in raising thousands of dollars to support Cystic Fibrosis. I was pleased to be able to present prizes for the most money raised and for the best dressed dog taking part!

Around 2500 Australians have Cystic Fibrosis, approximately 300 of whom live in South Australia. To find out how you can help Cystic Fibrosis SA, visit www.cysticfibrosis.org.au/sa-supports/



Walkers taking part in the Great Strides fundraiser

WORKING WITH SMALL BUSINESS

The backbone of Australia's economy is its 2.4 million small businesses which employ 3.8 million Australians. Along with my fellow Liberals, I am fighting hard for small businesses to ensure they aren't ignored during these difficult economic times.

I regularly visit many small businesses and together with Shadow Small Business Minister Steve Ciobo recently held a small business roundtable to discuss important issues affecting local small business proprietors.

If you would like to discuss issues affecting your small business, please contact my office.



Simon with Sue Pearce from Adelaide Expo Hire in North Plympton

LISTENING TO COUNTRY SA

Recently I travelled to Mt Gambier to meet with local community leaders and business operators. Small business are vital to country areas and too often their concerns go unheard and hard work unrecognised. I was pleased to be able to personally congratulate Top Spot Auto Dismantlers who won the 2008 Blue Lake recycling award and the 2008 Blue Lake business of the year award.

Telecommunications issues are always of high concern in country SA for businesses and residents. Local government representatives, local Internet Service Providers and residents confirmed that this is still the case. Since entering the Senate, fighting for wider coverage and better telecommunications services for all South Australians has been a top priority of mine. I will continue this fight!

SUPPORT REGIONAL SA

Want to help our regional communities and have a great time yourself? Take a weekend escape to one of these outstanding South Australian events ...

Port Lincoln Tunarama – January 24-26 – celebrate the area's famous fish! Enjoy music, food, wine, parades, amusements and the famous Tuna Toss.

Kangaroo Island Cup Carnival – February 14 & 16 – The pinnacle event on the KI calendar – Fashion, food, wine and racing.

Bundaleer Forest Weekend – March 27-29 – (Jamestown) Music and entertainment in the Bundaleer Forest.

Music on the Murray – April 4 – Biennial music festival on Waikerie's Murray foreshore. Entertainment includes musical maestro James Morrison and vocalist Emma Pask as well as the SA Police Big Band.

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LIBERALS WORKING TOGETHER

Our state and federal Liberal teams work together closely to deliver for South Australia. I'm pleased to work with State Liberal Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith on a range of important policy issues, especially matters relating to water security, local crime prevention and creating new jobs in SA.

Martin is working across the community to develop clear plans for our future. With his background of service to our country as officer in the Army's Special Air Service Regiment, experience in small business operating childcare centres and a young family he is well placed to lead our state with vision and determination.



HERE TO HELP

You might want to contact my office to pursue a grievance with a government department or agency or to get help with information on federal government programs.

If you would like to receive by email my newsletter updates on key policy areas please contact me at senator.birmingham@aph.gov.au with your details.

COMMUNITY VISITS?

As a Senator for South Australia I am always happy to visit or speak to your school, community group or any other organisation about issues that impact on our state, the operation of the parliament or on matters important to you. We can also assist you with planning any visits to Parliament House in Canberra. Please contact my office if you would like further information.



Simon and Olympic medallist Sam Riley at the launch of the Keep Watch Home

KEEP WATCH HOME POOL SAFETY CAMPAIGN

Each year in Australia up to 35 children under 5 drown, around half in backyard pools.

To make sure no one you love becomes a statistic, make this weekend your Home Pool Safety Weekend by using the Royal Life Saving checklist to make sure your pool area is safe for small children.

Contact my office for a copy or download it at www.homepoolsafety.com.au

VISIT MY NEW WEBSITE!

Shortly I will be launching my website – www.senatorbirmingham.com.au. The site will keep you up to date on my activities in the Senate, provide links to useful resources and outline ways I can help you!

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