

ISSUE 1914

# "In Support of Progress" Newsletter

Date: 3 June 2019

**Hospitals**  
**The State Budget**  
**Housing**  
**Fire and Flood**  
**Foreign Affairs**

## **The Hospital System**

The Auditor-General's Report into the state of the Tasmanian hospital system is a damning indictment on the way our hospitals are being managed. NB MANAGED! This is not new news – this news has been around for a long time.

Staff have been exposing the problems being experienced in the Emergency Departments for many months now. In exasperation, the Speaker of the House recently condemned her own Minister for the lack of action in resolving this matter.

In response, the Minister confirmed that a meeting, which was to be held in December to discuss this matter, had been brought forward to June. *Some crisis!*

This "comprehensive" meeting will bring experts from around Australia to discuss the problem. Mind you, the Minister has said he was not waiting for the meeting to start working on solutions, and he had already "had meetings". Not very effective ones, obviously. *Still, an example of the Minister being "very busy", no doubt!*

The Auditor-General's report has highlighted the real problem.

*"It is my conclusion that the Tasmanian hospital system is not working effectively...due (in part) to longstanding cultural and process weaknesses within hospitals that are impeding effective discharge planning, bed management and coordination between EDs and inpatient areas".*

The response of the Minister has been to invite the Auditor-General to his meeting. And in an extraordinary act of bipartisanship from the Minister, he has invited the Opposition to attend, "as long as they behave". *Now, boys and girls, don't be naughty!* But hey, what about the employees? Can they come too? Presumably they have some knowledge and insights. They might even behave also!

The local newspaper has welcomed this development. But I disagree entirely. Because it is a cop-out. Quite frankly, I don't think the Minister has much credibility when it comes to advising other MP's how to behave. But, more importantly, what planet does this man live on? What exactly is the problem here?

The Minister has said of those who have dared comment in the past that they are armchair critics and that he takes his advice from experts, with whom he has "meetings". Well, for starters, maybe he needs to change his experts.

The solutions are obvious, and they are not complex. The Auditor General has exposed them, and he is the latest in a long list to have done so. They do not require "meetings" to resolve them, they do not require "experts" to fly in from everywhere else to advise on solutions, and this current meeting is nothing more than a waste of time, effort, and money.

The problem, put simply, is administrative, not medical. It is overly complex, with archaic practices. One can always "complexify" matters when one wants to do so. Silo protection within administrations is always based on "complexification". Hospital administrators are paid to run hospitals. If they can't, then change them. It is that simple.

### The State Budget

The two opposition parties having made their speeches-in-reply, the State Budget is now going through the Parliamentary process of "estimates". No doubt the budget will pass through the Parliament, and we will have entered a new "Infrastructure" era.

On infrastructure, what did strike me when first looking at the figures presented by the Treasurer was that one-off grants from the Commonwealth for infrastructure were treated as income, but the spending of same was not treated as an expenditure. No doubt there is an accountant's reason for doing it this way, and it certainly helps the Treasurer's story that the Net Operating Balance is in surplus, however, balancing – or removing - these payments puts a different picture on the state of the Budget (see Table in #1913).

A different way of presenting the data, and in my view a simpler and more "honest" way, is to consider cash flow. Simply put, are we living within our means? John Lawrence presents the government's own data in a different format, and distinguishes between operating activities, investing activities, and financing activities. This information is from his website, and is republished with permission. (<http://tasfintalk.blogspot.com/>)

	2018/19	2019/20
<b>OPERATING</b>		
<b>Receipts</b>		
Grants	4,019	3,839
Taxation	1,193	1,213
Other (incl. dividends)	1,400	1,378
<b>Total receipts</b>	6,612	6,430
<b>Expenses</b>		
Employee costs	-2,864	-2,895
Other	-3,022	-2,931
<b>Total Expenses</b>	-5,886	-5,826
<b>Net operating cash</b>	726	604
<b>INVESTING</b>		
Infrastructure, plant etc	-667	-627
Government businesses	-138	-164
<b>Total investing cash</b>	-805	-791
<b>FINANCING</b>		
Unfunded super	-285	-303
Other loans & interest	-18	-22
<b>Total finance cash</b>	-302	-326
<b>CASH POSITION</b>	-380	-513

It tells a different story to that of the Treasurer. I would be interested to know what the Treasurer makes of such a presentation.

Note also that infrastructure spending next year is less than this year's. And yet this is meant to be an infrastructure budget! Mmmmm?

### **Housing**

There is a desperate need for emergency housing, and the problem is not going away. It's getting worse, and yet the government, wallowing in this "multi-faceted" issue, remains paralysed while the homeless suffer. Fourteen months after its summit, it is still searching for solutions. Emergency housing could be being provided, but isn't.

Why is the government so dumb-struck? Is taking emergency action that hard? Actually DOING something? What if there had been a natural disaster, a fire wiping out a suburb, or a flood or a landslip? I suspect under such circumstances action would be pretty swift.

The government will be measured by its approach to community services such as this. So far, it's not looking good.

### **Fire and Flood**

I presume the review into the summer bushfires is still under way. The submission by the AWU, representing the firefighters on the ground, makes for sober reading, and paints a far different picture to the way the fires were managed than what we have been told publicly.

I suspect there will be bureaucratic maneuvers to cover up a range of incompetent management actions during the course of the review. However, the fact remains that there was a serious and dangerous disconnect between management people who were well away from the fire, and those who were at the fire front.

The flood season is upon us again. Rivers are rising, flood warnings have been issued, farmers are considering how to protect stock, homeowners their properties. Meanwhile, levees haven't been built, "infrastructure" money has not been allocated in the current budget, and the status quo remains.

Let there be no wringing of hands when next we are inundated by rivers breaking their banks. Action could have been taken, but wasn't!

### **Foreign Affairs**

The US Secretary of State Mr. Bolton, has called for regime change in Iran, citing it as being an autocratic regime that oppresses its citizens. Bolton is strangely quiet when it comes to Saudi Arabia, another player in the internecine and interminable politics of the Middle East, which could be charged with the exact same allegation.

The US has dispatched a carrier fleet to the area, and has now stated it will be sending troops into the area – as a "defensive" measure.

Now I think it is the height of hubris to be interfering in the affairs of other states, and just imagine if his Iranian counterpart called for regime change in the USA, citing corruption, democratic "imperfections", the poverty of its citizens etc. There would be outrage. How would Bolton respond to that?

To put it bluntly, the US would appear to be spoiling for another conflict. Let it be said that it is not our conflict, nor should there be one.

I only hope that the US pulls back from this hawkish behavior, and that our government, like the Europeans, has advised the US it will not go "all the way..." with this one.