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PARLIAMENTARY LEADER

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Transcript

Legislative Council

GREENS MOTION: Magill Youth Training Facility

September 23rd, 2009

On the 23rd of September 2009, Mark moved the following motion:

That the Legislative Council –

1. Notes that –

(a) The young people detained in the Magill Youth Training Centre in South Australia are being held in degrading conditions; and

(b) In the assessment of the 2009 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, Mr Chris Varney, this represents a breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. Recognises that in 2006 the South Australian Labor government acknowledged that the centre was in need of replacement as it breached modern building codes and occupational health and safety requirements; and

3. Calls on the South Australian government to keep its election promise and urgently build a new facility to replace the Magill Youth Training Centre.

The Hon. M. PARNELL: How remarkable that, on the day that the Legislative Council is set to censure the government for its continued failure to respond to the community on the disaster that is the Magill Training Centre, we find that the Premier, in this parliament today, has, finally, announced that the government will spend \$67 million to build a new 60-bed secure youth justice facility to replace the Magill Training Centre.

I welcome the decision of the Premier. I congratulate the Premier for making that decision. But we can be in no doubt that the government has been dragged kicking and screaming into honouring its election promise. It is, I think, an important message for the people of South Australia to realise the importance of the Legislative Council, because I have no doubt that it is the fact that we are debating this this afternoon that has encouraged the Premier to finally admit what we have all known, that is, that the disgraceful Magill Training Centre, which breaches international standards, needs to be demolished and rebuilt.

The motion before us refers to recent representations by the Australian youth representative to the United Nations, who pointed out that the conditions at the Magill Training Centre represented a breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fact, Mr Chris Varney, who is that representative, was not the first person to have made that point.

Pam Simmons, the child advocate, has made that same point on a number of occasions, and in this parliament we have pointed out the fact that the Magill Training Centre does not meet international standards. In fact, I have used the example of the Magill Training Centre on a number of occasions to demonstrate the need for law reform in South Australia so that international treaties are more relevant in the decision-making processes of our ministers and bureaucrats.

What I think was most remarkable in this debate on the Magill Training Centre over recent weeks was the fact that the government tried to have us believe that this one facility—and we are now told it will be a \$67 million investment—was the project that would push us over the edge as a state and that we would lose our AAA credit rating. What a remarkable claim that was from the government.

The lesson that we have to learn from this whole experience is to look at this vulnerable group of young people: young people who have been in trouble but who have so much potential if only we can give them the chance and manage them properly. The lesson for us is that these young vulnerable people should not be left to carry the burden for the state's budget and credit rating. As it turns out, I will be amazed if any rating agency comes out and says, 'Oh no, South Australia's economy is now in ruins because of this commitment of \$67 million to rebuild the Magill Training Centre.'

The motion that I have moved today and that we will be considering calls on the South Australian government to keep its election promise and urgently build a new facility to replace the Magill Youth Training Centre. The fact of the Premier having made an announcement today I do not think precludes us from considering and passing this motion. We have the Premier's view that the new detention centre will be operating, I think he said in his statement, in the second half of 2011. I think the challenge should be to bring that forward, to build the facility as quickly as we can and to have it operating, if possible, before that date.

The particular wording of my motion reflects a similar motion that was moved in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. It was moved in the Senate by senator Sarah Hanson-Young and, as I understand it, in the House of Representatives by Mr Briggs.

So, while some members might feel that the motion is now redundant, I will be leaving it on the Notice Paper for members to consider, and hopefully to make contributions. I conclude my brief remarks now by saying that I am pleased that the government has listened to what people have been saying, not just in the past couple of weeks but over the past couple of years, and I look forward to seeing the opening of this new facility.

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