

SA Agenda Launch Speech

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South Australia is a special place. We have a unique history of social justice achievements. The Union movement has always been at the forefront of the social and economic development of our state.

Today we launch the agenda for a robust, socially just state developed by South Australian Unions. We make the statement in doing so that we will continue to play a legitimate and important role in shaping this place.

We are proudly South Australian. We have amazing people; we have the strength of being a small place that forces us to work together because we can't avoid each other. We produce beautiful food and wine, highly productive committed and innovative workers, an excellent education and training system, and we are creative and collaborative.

But we are now facing huge challenges. Unions in SA are in for the long haul and focussed on addressing these challenges in order to keep our state strong and fair and vibrant. This agenda articulates what we stand for and what we want. It will influence the direction of the state in an active and positive way in the interests of working people and their families. It allows all of you to better understand where we are coming from so we can better support you and where we have shared goals we can work together to achieve them . That is

why we are delighted that so many of you have accepted the invitation to come today.

The next few years provides us with enormous opportunities to get it right and enormous threats if we get it wrong.

The global economic crisis makes the four key areas of our agenda even more important to address - sharing the wealth of the mining boom and defence expansion, creating fair and safe work, addressing climate change, and the union movement in a healthy democracy.

Mining booms and industrial expansions deliver strong economic growth but not necessarily shared wealth. Our job is to ensure that the wealth created by the northern mining and defence expansions is shared with all the people of our state.

We have some of the lowest mining royalties in the country.

We need to significantly increase mining royalties and direct these to creating real opportunities, infrastructure and community development. Employment should be created for the people on whose land the mines operate.

The imbalance of power between enormous global corporations and the traditional people with some of the oldest living Indigenous culture of the world throws up real structural concerns. There should be strong and active support in the negotiating of mining rights between mining companies and traditional peoples.

We don't want our state to be just a quarry or a base for isolated unconnected industries. We need to ensure the expansion of the mining and defence industries provides sustainable long term employment, particularly in building

a strong manufacturing base. These expansions should also lead to innovation in industry and investment in social infrastructure.

Michael Keating from the SA Economic Development Board and the SA Training and Skills Commission has estimated that we will need an additional 133,000 workers for the major projects and another 260,000 just to replace people who are retiring or leaving.

It's a fabulous opportunity to focus on skilling up our people, to tap into the potential of women, the long term unemployed, the young, the disabled and Aboriginal people.

The training should add value to the worker so we can raise the general skill level of the whole community and create a flexible and highly skilled workforce.

The priority should be to train and employ local people. The temporary 457 visa scheme should be abolished and replaced with genuine migration programs where workers have access to all the rights of any worker in this country including the right to join and be an active member of their union.

We welcome diversity, not exploitation.

SA has many businesses that are proud of their connection to our state, work constructively with workers and their unions and positively contribute to their communities.

We are critical of corporate welfare with no strings attached. We do not support reduction in costs and taxes to business if this only leads to more profit and no benefits for workers or the community. It can also mean a reduction of important regulations that protect the environment, workers rights and public safety.

We say abolish the competitive council and adopt a triple bottom line approach to government decision making which takes into account social and environment imperatives alongside economic ones.

Reductions in taxes can be used strategically to encourage good corporate citizenship and social innovation. Things like payroll cuts to businesses that provide flexible working conditions for their workers or reductions in Workcover levies for those employers willing to employ injured workers from elsewhere.

What we don't want and see far too often is a culture of "dig it up, ship it out, see you later" or even worse, "set it up, ask for cash, see you later."

How about a "SA Good Corporate Citizen Award" to encourage and reward those businesses who recognise the value of contributing?

The SA Union movement has been an active and strong supporter of the SA Strategic plan. It is odd in our view that the only agency that doesn't seem to embrace the plan is the Treasury. Until the money follows the plan it will not achieve its objectives. That means not just funding those things in the plan but also not funding those things that work against achieving the plan's targets. We also suggest a grant program to support communities and organisations with ideas to meet the targets under the plan.

I think everyone in the world now agrees that investment in infrastructure is the way to go. In addition to federal government investment, let's utilise venture capital from the billions available through industry super funds generated from workers savings. Also let's not be shy about state borrowing and deficits.

It is great to know that today the draft of the federal legislation which will begin to reinstate fairness into our federal work laws is before Parliament. They are not all we wanted but re-establish a safety net, collective bargaining and balance as the basis of our industrial system.

There is still a nasty, undemocratic set of laws still in place which needs State Government support in advocating to the Federal Government for its removal, and they are the laws in the building industry.

In a competitive labour market SA needs an edge. We say safety, fairness and opportunity is the edge we can create.

We can attract and retain workers by being the state that protects young workers, has the highest safety standards at work and in the community, supports those who are injured at work and helps them back into employment and good health. We can be the place where paid maternity leave is more generous than a national scheme, where work-life balance is a serious issue and working families are supported through flexible working arrangements and high quality childcare. Where we can truly say this is a great place to raise a family.

There is also a job to do on the wages front. Our community and service industries have some of the lowest wages in the country. Our gender pay gap is growing and youth wages are low. If the wages of people in the mining and defence industries boom with the boom then there will be even greater inequality and a more difficult skills shortage in the important community sector.

One in five of the state's workers work in public services such as education, health, emergency services and care.

It's time to stop the blaming and demonising of the public service and instead engage their expertise and recognise their contribution and value.

We need to reinstate the importance of frank and fearless advice and be an employer of choice where young people want to work in order to contribute to the greater good.

We urgently need to fix the public sector bargaining process which sends thousands of workers in waves of conflict through the institution of a tight Treasury and an inflexible industrial relations approach.

South Australia is on the edge of a desert and at the end of a river.

We are not the experts in this area but it has become an issue that no sector can ignore as it impacts on every person in every area of their life, including in their work. The threat to the wine and food industries of climate change and water shortage is enormous.

We strongly support the need for a carbon trading scheme but we also have to manage the transition in industries that are directly affected by the scheme so workers and businesses that are crucial to the economic survival of communities in our state are supported. It is important to also put in place measures to ensure that addressing climate change doesn't further disadvantage the poor.

We suggest establishing a "green heroes" project which assists and rewards workplaces and communities which adopt green practices. The introduction of climate change clauses in enterprise agreements would be a great start.

We need to embrace the creativity and goodwill of the whole community by holding a high level forum where industry, union, community, environment and business in SA come together and develop a shared approach.

This could include a positive approach to tap into the real potential of the development of a green economy and green collar jobs for a sustainable employment future.

Strong, independent and democratic unions are crucial to a strong system of democracy. It is our job to provide a balance to powerful vested interests.

Unions have been at the forefront of struggles to improve not just the wages and conditions of their members but also to provide for education and health systems. Unions have established retirement benefits for the whole community; have opposed budget cuts to important community programs, unfair laws and ill advised developments.

To increase the health of our democracy here in South Australia, the role of trade unions needs to be recognised and the work of union delegates supported because it's through their unions that working people improve their workplaces, add value to their industries and advance the state as a whole.

Today we publicly launch our agenda for the future.

It's not a static document. It's an active document. It is one we will use to generate public debate and shift public opinion. We want to set a direction for our state over the next 30 years. We will use it to evaluate the policies and priorities of political parties in the lead up to the next state election.

It will form the basis of our ongoing campaign to create a just South Australia with safe and fair working conditions and a strong sustainable economy that supports families, communities and the environment for the future.