



Liberals visit Lake Grace

LIBERAL Party representatives were in Lake Grace on Saturday, February 26 for a local Liberal branch annual general meeting, which was followed by a public meeting at the Lake Grace Hotel.

In attendance were Senator Judith Adams, MLA Dr Graham Jacobs MLA, MLC Jim Chown, MLC Brian Ellis and Liberal Party state president Barry Court AM.

With the public meeting ably run by Liberal Party president Debby Clarke, the politicians were a captive audience for local constituents who were keen to speak about the issues affecting them, their families, businesses and the community in general.

Senator Adams, Mr Chown and Mr Ellis all have farming backgrounds and have a clear understanding of the issues that are affecting farmers in the Wheatbelt.

Ms Adams registered her disappointment in local member National Party representative Tony Crook, whose vote in favour of the carbon tax has meant this tax will become a reality (72 in favour versus 71 against).

Mr Chown said he felt the Coalition was working well with firm policies and many of their election promises had come to fruition.

Some of these promises have included 68.5 million being allocated to the Royal Flying Doctor Service which has afforded it new planes; the improvements to the Muchea saleyards; Patients Assisted Travel Service (PATS) funding has been increased with the criteria for applying having become less laborious; and that the Indian Ocean Drive has been completed which has reduced the traffic on the Brand Highway by 30 per cent.

Mr Chown also commented on the recent media in regards to the refurbishment of Dumas House; this is being done so that all members of Parliament can be under the one roof, rather than being scattered throughout the metropolitan area.

Royalties for Regions was acknowledged to have been a windfall for the rural area with over a billion dollars being spent over and above the normal regional expenditure.

Some concerns were

raised as to whether this money should be directed more toward infrastructure such as hospitals and roads.

Brian Ellis made comment that between the major parties, the Liberals have more representatives from a rural background.

He also spoke about early childhood education and that although it was wonderful for children to have access to education from a young age he was concerned that the fun was being taken out of early childhood and that more active parenting was being taken out of the equation.

Dr Jacobs, having been involved in a medical practice for many years was able to give a driver's seat view of the difficulties in retaining doctors in rural areas and said even in Esperance they had struggled at times to attract doctors.

He said the days had gone when the doctor would reside in a country town for years with his/her children attending the local school.

Practice management has become a headache and new doctors don't want to run a business.



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they just want to practise medicine.

He said he felt country clinical practice had taken away some of the fear of going to the bush and reduced the need for younger doctors to remain within their comfort zone of the metropolitan area.

Issues that arose from the audience were that PATS wasn't quite perfect; that dental still isn't included and that patients weren't able to remain with a long-term medical practitioner (with whom they had history and rapport) and get PATS if there was a suitable prac-

itioner closer.

There were also strong feelings that the government over regulated primary producers; that farmers had to maintain standards that weren't even expected by the importing country.

With primary producers generating more income in Australia than mining; farmers feel that government needs to be more supportive.

The issue was raised that Australian farmers pay twice as much for farm machinery as their Canadian and United States competitors; simply because of the import

tax. Water grants were lauded as a wonderful opportunity for farmers to attempt to drought proof their properties; however there were concerns of a conflict of interest from the assessors.

Lack of support for regional students to gain tertiary education was also brought up.

Students are supported by the government via isolated children's payments until they finish year 12.

From there they are on their own.

They can't receive Youth Allowance until

they gain financial independence from their parents (if their parents earn \$45,114 or less they are automatically eligible).

To do this they have to have worked part-time (at least 15 hours per week) for two years, or have earned at least \$19,532 over an 18-month period.

Local farmers feel that the greatest financial drain on the community and district is bank interest, with farmers struggling to service the interest on the debt this is going to be an ongoing problem, crippling the profitability of the region.



MEETING THEIR ELECTORS: MLC Brian Ellis MLC, MLA Dr Graham Jacobs, MLC Jim Chown, Barry Court AM and Senator Judith Adams at the Lake Grace Hotel.