Dr Sophie Scamps MP media statement

The Albanese Government’s first full budget boasts a surplus of missed opportunities. The Treasurer should be commended for delivering Australia’s first surplus in 15 years, however it’s clear the government has delayed the serious reform we need.

It’s clear the budget faces serious structural issues, and our over-reliance on personal income tax revenue must be addressed. We must prioritise serious tax reform if we are to create a prosperous and equal society in the future. As I have made clear, the redesign of the PRRT was a missed opportunity to broaden our revenue base and ensure Australia receives a fair share of tax for our natural resources. While Norway has created a sovereign wealth fund via their fossil fuel tax regime, Australia’s future generations face decades of national debt.

The budget was also a missed opportunity to supercharge our ability to become a renewable energy superpower. The $2 billion investment in Australia’s hydrogen energy industry is welcome, as are the modest investments to help electrify small businesses and social housing. However the government’s investment in green energy is a drop in the ocean when compared to the nearly $750 billion in new spending and tax breaks under the US Inflation Reduction Act. The current level of investment in industry incentives and subsidies here in Australia may not be enough to stop some of our emerging businesses and industries heading offshore.

The lack of investment in our environment is also a glaring omission. While there is money to create the legislative framework to protect our environment in the future, there is little money to actually protect Australia’s threatened species and flora right now. It has been estimated that we need to invest over $1.5 billion per year to reverse Australia’s extinction crisis, so $341.2 million over five years is nowhere enough to halt the decline of our precious national wildlife.

The budget papers forecast we will spend over $106 billion on healthcare next financial year – the second largest area of expenditure. However the government has only provided $53.4 million in funding for preventative health measures and has yet again refused to fund the National Obesity Strategy. Obesity is the leading cause of chronic disease and if we want to tackle rising healthcare costs, we must tackle Australia’s obesity epidemic. With the health system stretched to its limits this is a serious missed opportunity.

The government has also trumpeted $3.5 billion to increase incentives for GPs to bulkbill patients under the age of 16 as well as pensioners and Commonwealth Card holders. While this is very welcome, there will still be many patients who delay seeking medical attention due to out-of-pocket expenses. As a GP, I know the biggest incentive to bulkbill is an increase in the Medicare rebate, without an increase to the rebate, vast numbers of Australians will continue to face rising costs to see a GP. Nor does the budget go far enough to meaningfully address the critical shortage of GPs across the country. Where will the workforce come from to staff the new Urgent Care Clinics?
Mental health is also severely underfunded. $556.2 million over five years isn’t enough to tackle our nation’s mental health crisis.

This budget was a missed opportunity to reform our tax system to make it sustainable for future generations. It was also a missed opportunity to invest heavily in becoming a renewable energy superpower, to protect our environment and to tackle our health crisis. While the government may enjoy the political victory of delivering a one-off surplus, it has simply kicked the hard decisions and debate further down the road.

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