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Member for Kingston
GRIEVANCE DEBATE
Broadband
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Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.21 p.m.)—I rise tonight to highlight a serious issue affecting many people living in Adelaide's south, and that is inadequate access to high-speed broadband. This is a problem for homes where high-speed internet access is now a necessity for education and basic finances, particularly for businesses competing in a tough commercial environment. The failure to ensure a world-class broadband network in our country is one of the greatest failings of the previous government. It would be comparable to a government in the late 19th century neglecting to build rail lines.

My constituents have indicated, in a wide-ranging survey, that broadband access ranked behind only water security and cost of living as a matter of importance. I have frequently encountered people in my electorate who are not able to access ADSL2 and who have to rely on dial-up internet. In South Australia, records indicate that only 29 per cent of people have high-speed broadband access. It is difficult to comprehend why the previous government so badly neglected the broadband issue, but the ramifications for my state and my local area have been pronounced. The Howard government was obviously not listening to those living and working in the southern Adelaide area—the families, businesses and residents of Morphett Vale, Hallett Cove, Aldinga, Willunga, Hackham and Woodcroft, to name a few.

An illustration of the previous government's lack of interest in or understanding of broadband is clearly shown by the comments made by the previous minister, Senator Coonan, who said, 'Australian broadband is okay,' and, 'No-one is complaining about the speeds of broadband in metropolitan areas.' The previous minister was certainly not listening to the constituents in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, who were loudly saying that broadband was a problem in metropolitan areas as well as rural and regional areas.

For local businesses to remain internationally competitive and to operate in global markets in a digital age, they depend on high-speed bandwidth. As it stands currently, there is a significant shortage of connection lines in outer metropolitan suburbs and country areas. Despite the best efforts of residents and businesses to acquire it, high-speed broadband internet is essentially out of reach. Residents can choose to install and maintain personal satellite dishes to achieve a high-speed connection, but this process is too expensive for the majority of local families who genuinely need broadband for the purpose of keeping up with increasingly advanced software and websites. Anyone who has tried to negotiate a contemporary website or to use email with large attachments will understand just how inadequate a dial-up modem can be.

I would like to now highlight three cases in my electorate where people are suffering adversely from the broadband inadequacy. In my electorate I have many small wineries in the McLaren Vale region. These wineries rely on exporting their products around the world. One such winery is the internationally renowned Chapel Hill. Unfortunately, this winery is unable to access fast broadband, although other businesses less than 300 metres away can. Not being able to run their business on dial-up, the winery has connected to satellite broadband but finds its speeds are still extremely slow. In addition, the winery manager has reported that on wet days the satellite broadband often does not work. The manager reports having to often send large documents urgently to the winery's Swiss parent company. He has reported to me that doing business without fast, reliable broadband is extremely frustrating and time consuming for this winery, which is trying to compete in a global market.

However, it is not only the areas on the edge of the metropolitan areas, such as McLaren Vale, which are experiencing problems. One family I spoke to, who live in Warburton Drive, Woodcroft, demonstrated to me the scope of the problem. Woodcroft is only 24 kilometres away from the CBD of Adelaide. The father, Brian, contacted my office after continued attempts to find a service provider proved unsuccessful. Service providers simply did not want to risk the expenditure, because they believed there were not enough customers to make it viable. Brian's family need the internet to attend to their study commitments. His wife is forced to commute 45 minutes to Marlestone TAFE to do all of her homework. Brian's son has to stay late at Flinders University and catch the bus home late at night to remain academically competitive. Meanwhile, Brian cannot maintain his own business to the standard he wants because he cannot establish an email service for his clients. Each member of the family has their own personal reasons for needing the internet, but they could not get it despite their efforts and because of where they live.

The same goes for Paul, a man who is 30 years of age and who lives in Hackham. With no cables laid in his street, he has no access to high-speed internet. None of the wireless service providers want to help. Eventually Paul did apply for a subsidy under the Australian Broadband Guarantee. However, while the government subsidised the installation and maintenance, Paul found himself paying huge amounts of money, which was just not competitive with what people were enjoying in the city. The installation of the satellite facility affected the value of his house and impacted adversely on his relations with his neighbours. He eventually ended the service because he could no longer afford it. It is clear that it is an economic and social imperative that people in my electorate have access to high-speed broadband.

The Howard government slotted broadband internet into a list of extravagances that Australia did not need. Just as they did not believe in climate change—and still really do not—the previous administration did not see the critical need to keep up internet speeds. The previous government tried and failed 18 broadband initiatives because they lacked proper consideration and, most importantly, any financial conviction to see it through.

Fortunately, the Rudd Labor government is a government that acts and follows through with the necessary investment. We have committed \$4.7 billion for the installation of a national broadband network in Australia, which will see 98 per cent of homes and businesses gain access to high-speed broadband services upon completion, ensuring that all Australians, including people living in outer metropolitan areas and rural and regional Australia, participate in the digital economy. This broadband initiative will facilitate the mass flow of information of

digital cargoes from house to house, town to town, state to state and from Australia to the rest of the world. This broadband initiative will make Australia technologically competitive with other developed nations overseas and seriously upgrade the flow of information between borders that is so vital in the newly emerging digital economy.

The Rudd government's commitment to having a high-speed national broadband network will be of great benefit to my electorate, and I know families in my area are looking forward to this great national project coming to fruition. Broadband is critical to Australia's long-term future. High-speed broadband is a critical enabling technology that will influence and define our economic prosperity into the future. Businesses and local councils in the south of Adelaide, in addition to the Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board, have sent me a clear message that the lack of broadband is creating constraints to the productive capacity of these businesses. Families have sent me a clear message that they want to access fast, reliable and reasonably priced broadband to allow them to participate in the knowledge economy. I am pleased that the Rudd government is listening and is getting on with the job of rolling out fast and reliable broadband for all Australians.

Debate adjourned.