

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee. Retaining Youth in Rural towns and Communities.

Date: 12th April 2006

Location: Alexandra

Venue: The Court Room, CEACA, Cnr Webster and Downey Streets

Times: 10am - 2:30pm.

Introduction

Dear Members,

My name is Anna Dominguez Smith. I am Secretary of *The Seymour We Want Committee Inc.* (TSWW)

This is a Personal Submission because I am a parent of eight young Victorians.

My involvement in our town group and more recently, the Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network (CRLLEN), is to have an influence in the development of Seymour, specifically, to enable it to become a city by 2020. This will add balance to the development of rural Victoria.

If you look at a map, you see the regional cities of Warnambool, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Wangaratta and Wodonga stretch right across Victoria, but, at Seymour, there is a gap. Why?

The recent State Government policies of 'A Fairer Victoria' and 'Maintaining the Advantage' and the Inquiries into improved access to telecommunications and strengthening communities, when they are implemented, will go some way towards redressing the disadvantage caused by many years of centralizing Government services and benefits.

Terms of Reference:

1. Identifying and examining the factors that influence young people in deciding to remain in or leave the rural communities in which they reside;

It might be pertinent, at this point, to give a short history lesson of our local area, for the benefit of Members. Up till the Seventies, we had a policy called 'Decentralisation', which cross-subsidized basic services and benefits. It was a way of redistributing Australia's wealth and maintaining populations in the country. It was deemed to be unproductive in the Eighties and therefore, dismantled. By, approximately, 1996 State and Federal Government policy changes had had such a devastating impact on the people of Seymour. Namely, the downsizing of V/Line, the redeployment of the Armoured Tank Division to Darwin. Then, to fill the void, their replacement with a large influx of poor, marginalised people, without proper support.

2. Identifying and examining the factors that influence young people in deciding whether or not to return to the rural communities in which they have previously resided following the completion of study, travel or other fixed or short term activities in other places, and

It took the Report *Unequal in Life - the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales, August 1999* of brave Fr. Peter Norden, from the Jesuit Social Services, to highlight this publicly. This placed Seymour as the 10th most disadvantaged small town in NSW and Victoria. From this sprang an action group, *The Seymour We Want Committee* Inc. composed of ALL our community groups, to turn Seymour around. Even though they have had a long and proud history of contributing, individually, they were powerless to halt the deep neglect that had occurred. Australian Bureau of Statistics data in the *Mitchell Shire Economic Profile 2003* and *Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network Environmental Scan 2003 and 2004* clearly shows how our housing and job markets collapsed. Since the formation of TSWW, many wonderful events have taken place to improve our hometown. This is my reason for helping form a sub-committee, the *Seymour Arts Council*, in May 2004, and then joining the main group in October 2004. So many improvements have occurred, that by 2005, it was rated as the 110th most disadvantaged town, even allowing for the inclusion of three extra measuring criteria.

3. Developing strategies and recommendations on steps that might be taken to increase the number of young people who decide to remain in or return to rural towns and communities.

May I suggest to the State Parliament that all these recent communications could be fleshed out into a '**Green Fields**' **Regional City Development**. It will showcase all the advances of the Third Millennium, by building Seymour, into such a city. Personally, and this is my field of interest, a **Biomedical /Science Precinct**, second to none in the Southern Hemisphere. Being an hour away from everywhere, with an unspoilt, rural retreat atmosphere, is a major draw card these days. This will give the State Parliament a rural development focus, after all the development that has occurred in Melbourne for the 2006 XVIIIth Commonwealth Games.

Thank you for your time.

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