

THE FUTURE OF THE BAROSSA TOURIST TRAIN DERAILED STILL FURTHER?

The future of a Barossa Tourist Train may have returned to the ‘too hard basket’ following the pre-selection of Premier Marshall’s media apparatchik who has been effectively ‘parachuted’ into the seat of Schubert to represent the Liberals at the 2022 State election – (see our cartoon below!)

On Saturday February 13, Schubert’s Liberal Party Electoral College – made up of some 150 eligible voters – gathered in Nuriootpa to choose one of three candidates to replace the troubled Stephan Knoll.

They chose Marshall’s ‘Captain’s Pick’, Ashton Hurn, whose connection to the Barossa is that her family is a ‘known name’ in the Valley – and that she went to school in the area, before leaving not many years ago – only to show up politically as Marshall’s media flack.

The other two candidates for pre-selection were Caroline Rhodes (the CEO of Grain Producers SA – and who was allegedly Knoll’s preferred choice) – and Stephen Balch, the President of the Barossa Liberal Party Branch and who has worked tirelessly on local Barossa Boards and community committees since arriving in the Valley 6 years ago.

In the lead-up to the vote, Hurn and Rhodes spent thousands on glossy brochures to convince the Electoral College to vote for them (Balch also produced a professional brochure at considerably less cost) – but what really swung the votes in Hurn’s favor was apparently a concerted phone-call campaign which, we are advised, saw Liberal Government Ministers calling those eligible to vote, asking them to vote for Hurn. The *pièce de résistance* was that Marshall himself hit the phones in the last week – an age-old tactic in political persuasion that, in the end, had the desired effect.

So how does that affect the possible instatement of a Barossa Tourist Train?

Well may you ask! Of the three candidates, only ONE came out publicly as a strong supporter of the BTT – and that was Stephen Balch.

Rhodes was silent on the issue (and if she was Knoll’s choice we can understand why) – and Hurn, by political osmosis, also remained publicly silent - imbued, as she apparently is, by her Party’s total disinterest in regional rail.

Balch, on the other hand, knew exactly what benefits a BTT could bring to the Barossa – and as a former Government Whip in the Northern Territory Legislature, was willing to ‘crack the whip’ over the backsides of Department of Transport and Department of Tourism mandarins to make a BTT a reality.

Sadly, history now records that the Barossa Liberal College voters were, like rabbits, ‘blinded by the headlights’ shining out of North Terrace.

With Hurn safely ensconced in Schubert, the Liberals are no longer likely to be pressured internally to see a return of the BTT – or other regional rail opportunities, for that matter.

“Move along Citizens...there’s nothing to see here....”

The only other glimmer of hope for a BTT is the efforts being made by the Labor Party's Member for Light, Tony Piccolo, who has established a 'task force' to determine the Barossa's desire to see a Barossa Tourist Train running into the Valley.

His 'task force' is comprised of a number of regional luminaries including the Mayors of Gawler and the Barossa, Barossa business and community entities, and long-time proponents of a BTT, including the (now retired) Liberal Parliamentary representative of the area (and fierce supporter of a BTT), the Hon. Ivan Venning.

Piccolo is a good 'grass roots' politician – and under the first-proposed electoral boundary changes to Schubert, which reduced the 'Liberal hold' over the electorate from 15% to about 5% (and which would have included his 'heart-land' supporters in the Gawler region) – Piccolo saw that a BTT would benefit Barossa tourism.

The final re-draw of the seat of Shubert however removed Piccolo's 'home-land' areas, ensuring Shubert remains one of the Liberal Party's safest State seats (with, on paper at least, a 15% margin).

Nevertheless, Piccolo has carried through his commitment to his 'task force' investigation – and assuming his investigation confirms the benefits of a BTT, SARRA hopes the issue will become an official Labor Party Policy in the lead-up to the 2022 Election.

The question THEN becomes – will Labor or Liberal take the State forward post 2022?

Our assessment of the political battleground leading up to the election will follow as the State Election approaches, but based on issues such as the unpopular privatisation of metropolitan public transport (and the bad management of that process), the rising cost of essential services (electricity particularly), the Liberal's rejection of the voter-popular 'Clipsal 500' race (which brought millions of dollars to Adelaide's CBD) and the continuing malaise affecting employment and real loss of confidence in SA and its economic future, Marshall has the job ahead of him to be re-elected.

Marshall's handling of the COVID crisis has been adequate – but in reality he has only been a 'mouth-piece' for chief medical officer Nicola Spurrier and Top Cop Grant Stevens, who were – and remain – the major decision-makers handling the crisis. Marshall's real contribution has effectively only been to bring his ink-pad and rubber stamp to COVID-taskforce meetings.

Political pundits agree that the 'shine' that Marshall promotes as a 'leader' in this regard will fade as the election-day draws closer.

It is interesting that the State has, working in association with the Murdoch press, promoted the so-called future of the State, in a glossy insert into the Sunday Mail and other 'organs' of the Murdoch empire in recent days. The brochure (which incidentally would have been driven by the said Media Flack, Ashton Hurn) promotes the 'glitz and glam' of 'Illumination Adelaide' (whatever that is), and 'Lot Fourteen', where a handful of nerds are plotting to throw shoe-box sized satellites into orbit.

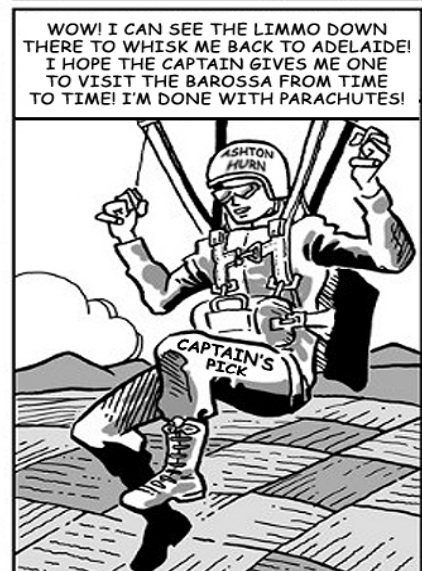
These 'initiatives' WILL NOT provide jobs for those thrown out of meaningful work by the lack of State Government action (or inaction) over recent years – AND WILL NOT HELP REGIONAL SA.

Will the Labor Opposition step up to the plate and provide real, workable policies to counter this lacklustre 'Hurn PR-driven' Liberal spin??

Only time will tell. Stay tuned – in the meantime check out our 'cartoon' take on Hurn being 'parachuted' into the Seat of Shubert, below!

(We had a chuckle when we saw the 'base cartoon' and sought and have approval to use it, from its creator Barry J. Corbett, (© 2015), and which was an excerpt from his Graphic Novel 'Terminal Velocity'. More of Barry's work can be found here: <http://www.corbettfeatures.com>)

THE GRAPES OF WRATH....?



**MEMO - FROM THE CAPTAIN TO ASHTON HURN -
Hope you enjoyed your soft landing into the
Seat of Schubert!**