

Stop attacking soft target

THE hardworking people of the public sector are a soft target and suffering unfair accusations of laziness from business and the media, despite fulfilling vital roles in South Australia.

Unlike the private sector, they are forbidden by law to speak up in their own defence.

Yet time and time again, as they prepare to go to work on behalf of our community, they have to read this same, tired old line.

Who are these people under attack?

They are the people who care for your children. The people who work to build better roads and bridges and hospitals. The people who guard our state's most dangerous people, care for our disabled and endangered, enforce our laws, protect our parks and environment, and run our healthcare system.

They are the same people the government is about to thank for their achievements in the imminent Public Sector Week and the same people whose work on behalf of us all the government is about to put on show.

Medical scientists, dentists and dental therapists, occupational therapists, marine scientists, school services officers, engineers, park rangers, correctional services officers, forensic scientists, ultrasonographers - the list goes on and on.

Cardigan-wearing? Flexitime image? Tell that to the thousands of people in our community who are helped, every day of the year, at

The public sector has come under attack, with the State Government announcing a big shake-up. **Jan McMahon**, general secretary of the Public Service Association, says flawed stereotypes of public servants persist in spite of the reality of increasing workloads and budget cuts.



33 agencies, 88 leadership courses

PS warned: It is time to shape up

GREG KELTON
STATE EDITOR

All Government departments will be reviewed over the next

“We will be able to measure the way our agencies are being run

strong financial controls, there has been less scrutiny of the general performance of agencies,” he said.

Mr Weatherill said the new system would enable the Gov-

Mr Weatherill said, “For the first time, we will be able to measure the way our agencies are being run and to fix the problem areas, before they affect services to the communi-

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all hours of the day and night, by our public sector workers. Our state's peak business body also refers to yet another “shake-up” of the public sector, aimed at “making the public sector operate in the same lean, mean, efficient way that the private sector does”.

Would that be the same lean, mean, efficient private sector that has plunged our global economy into chaos through its lack of corporate responsibility and greed?

The same private sector which demanded new laws to unfairly sack workers, the WorkChoices laws so soundly defeated at the last federal election?

What this simplistic statement overlooks is that government departments are not profit centres - they are service providers.

Their roles cannot be performed by a call centre in Mumbai, or outsourced to the lowest fly-by-night bidder. They are there for the

protection and service of us all. The Public Service Association is not against reform and ensuring that the vital work of the public sector is being done effectively. This most recent so-called “shake-up” is the latest of many, most of them costing millions of dollars in consultancy fees - none of them listening to the people who actually work in the public sector.

The Public Sector Performance Commission has not even met the

PSA in the past 12 months to discuss how true reform can be achieved and better services provided.

If it had, it would have heard the reality of increasing workloads, budget cuts, job cuts and frontline services being lost.

One of the “shock” findings of this commission is that 33 different government departments are running 88 separate leadership courses. This is no surprise to the PSA or to members of the public sector.

We have long argued that the “silo mentality”, where each government agency or department has limited interaction or ability to move staff between them, is a major failing which inevitably leads to consequences such as this.

The commission's apparent conclusion - that this problem can be fixed by giving more powers to chief executives - is disturbing, and displays the usual lack of comprehension of the true problems facing the public sector. Genuine reform needs to be about more than cost-cutting and job losses.

An efficient and effective public sector needs long-term stability and consistent policy direction - not a climate of fear and job cuts.

Genuine debate on community needs and expectations is welcome, not more invective and public-servant bashing.

It is time for the name-calling to stop and some true discussion to begin about the impact of the ever-increasing community need for services in a climate of budget cuts and job-shedding.