Australian politics, farming and the future.

Firstly, thank you to Peter Manuel and FLAG Australia for inviting me here tonight.

I would like to start by telling you a bit about myself. As Peter mentioned, I am the Nick Xenophon Team candidate for Mayo. I have lived in Mayo for near 20 years and with my husband Nathan we operate a small business in the building industry as well as raise three children aged 11 to 16.

Aside from supporting Nathan with the operation of our business, I also work writing youth policy having spent the last four years in executive management in the youth sector, primarily focused on ensuring young people successfully make that transition from school to employment.

I am a firm believer that if the first experience a young person has in the work force is unemployment, then we as a country have failed them.
I live in the north of the electorate in the Torrens Valley area and I am involved in a number of organisations in my community including being Chair of our Mt Torrens Soldier’s Memorial Hall.

My contact with Nick Xenophon started in early 2014 when the program I was the national executive officer for, Youth Connections, faced defunding by the Federal Government.

I was particularly frustrated that while youth unemployment was increasing, the only federal program that worked with 30,000 of Australia’s most disengaged young people was facing the axe.

Nick, although not on the Committee himself, worked with his Senate colleagues and I presented to the Senate Select Committee on the Abbott Government’s Proposed Budget of 2014.

I was particularly struck by Nick’s passion for South Australia, and how like me, he sees enormous potential for South Australia, not just negative headlines, such as the worst unemployment rate in Australia, the rust belt as we are sometimes unkindly referred to.
I talked to Nick about the lack of vision I was seeing from our Federal Members of Parliament, that we had moved away from long term planning for our nation to 3 year election cycle policy planning, to bite sized sound bites and three-word slogans and that now, more than ever, we needed long term planning, sensible, cautious, intelligent planning for Australia’s, and in particular, South Australia’s long term prosperity.

I shared that I felt our nation’s parliament should be a contest of ideas, a place where there was true representation by members to bring to the parliament the views of their electorate and where the elected member would contribute to the national debate for the betterment of their electorate.

I complained about the lack of long term vision for the benefit of the people of Australia, rather than the current myopic/short sighted game playing and point scoring we see between the two major parties whose representatives are largely career politicians who have never had a real job outside of their party.
It is this long-term vision that gave Australia the superannuation scheme, universal health care, the floating of Australia’s dollar; and under Howard and Costello, the Future Fund. It was this lack of vision that I bemoaned was missing.

And so, to cut a long story short, fortunately Senator Xenophon didn’t think I was crazy, and instead suggested I consider standing for the seat in the region where I love - Mayo.

What followed after that was essentially a year-long job interview, where collectively as a team we worked to develop our policies and prove that we were worthy of being a candidate on the team.

The Nick Xenophon Team is based on three key principles;

• We are anti-predatory gambling. This has been a platform that Nick Xenophon has carried since first entering state politics in the 1990s.

• We believe in transparency of government, and this includes all facets of government and political parties and extends to parliamentary entitlements and to political party donations, we
believe every dollar paid by the Australian tax payer should be accounted for in a timely manner.

- Finally, we believe in Australian Made. WE believe we make the best, we grow the best, and so, we should support our own industries to flourish.

The Australian Government spends 39Billion annually on procurement; that is the day-to-day running the Government.

We believe every dollar possible of this should be spent on Australian grown and Australian produced products.

Just this week, we supported the South Australian Government’s “Support our Steel” policy, but we believe that should be a nationwide effort.

We can be the masters of our own economic destiny.

As a party, we are NOT beholden to big business or the unions, which allows us the freedom to make decisions that are in the best interests of Australia, and not of vested interests.
Nick Xenophon likes to joke that because we do not woo donations we are operating not a shoe string budget, but a dental floss budget.

But, it costs nothing to knock on doors and chat with people about what matters to them and so that is the focus of our efforts.

So that is a bit about me and a bit about the Nick Xenophon team.

Now, I most certainly do not stand here thinking I have all the answers, nor am I across every issue in South Australia or in Mayo.

But here are some of the key issues that are on my mind:

Without a doubt South Australia, and in particular the Mayo electorate, bordering the Barossa and incorporating the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island regions are some of the best parts of Australia. Our regions have enormous potential to play a very important role in Australia’s future prosperity.

However, we as a State, facing some very big challenges. We are in a state of transition, as a state we have for generations been reliant on a solid manufacturing industry, our population is not growing at the same rate as the eastern states, and our population is rapidly aging.
Our aging population is, I think, our greatest challenge.

We have the highest unemployment rate in the nation. Our youth unemployment is in places around 20%, and that is really a hidden number as once a person is working just a couple of hours a week, they are no longer counted as unemployed. Realistically, when you combine youth unemployment and underemployment, you are talking about 1 in 3 young people.

The reality is, if we want to have an Australian workforce, and if we want to ensure that older Australians can be looked after well in retirement, we need to invest in ensuring we have full youth employment, not more than double the mainstream unemployment rate. Contributing significantly to our youth unemployment rate, is the reality that every year, fewer and fewer entry level jobs exist.

A few weeks ago I was in a park in Stirling, waiting for Channel 10 to arrive for an interview. I saw three young guys in their early 20s sitting on a park bench so I went and introduced myself – of course I
am sure they were delighted to have this middle aged lady come wandering up!

But anyway, we got chatting and they were a bit sad that as three best friends since primary school, their worlds were changing and they had little control over it.

• The first young man was heading to Melbourne, the course he wanted to study that combined engineering and urban planning wasn’t offered in South Australia. He would rather stay home, he didn’t know anyone in Melbourne and didn’t like the place much.

• The second young man had finished his engineering degree. He applied for countless jobs here, but was about to get on a plane as he managed to land in Perth.

• The third young man will finish his University degree this year. He was already concerned about how he will find a job here and didn’t know if he would need to head east or west.
I felt terribly sad for these three young men. They loved living in South Australia. This is where their families are; this is where they belong.

The tragedy for us, for South Australia in this story, is that we are losing our best and brightest young people. Even when they don’t want to go, they are being pulled interstate because that is where the jobs are few ever return.

When I left school, I had lots of options. Uni was cheap, if you wanted to start earning, you sat the public service or bank entry exam. There were factories and offices all needing lots of keen young people.

You didn’t need experience, or qualifications, you could be a Girl Friday, take a filing clerk position, or be a junior hand in a factory. All were a start. All led to something.

Those jobs I mentioned don’t exist anymore. I am sure if you think about your first job, for many in this room, it won’t exist anymore.
either. So we need to address the lack of opportunities for young people if we want to address the effect of our aging population.

It is one thing to change the vocabulary we use to include words like ‘innovation’, ‘agility’, ‘nimble’, all favoured by our Prime Minister, but what does that really mean once you have sold the farm and close the factories ??

Despite the challenges of aging, and South Australia’s declining manufacturing industry, I am an optimist.

I do believe we have the potential for a very exciting future. But decision makers need to ACT NOW.

The success of our future, will rest on our reputation and ability to produce high quality food, and our ability to produce renewable energy.

**So what could that future look like?** This week our nation’s population clock ticked over to 24 million people. This mark was reached 17 years than earlier predicted.
By the year 2050 our world population will be 10 BILLION. Asia, our nearest neighbour is expected to be 5.2 BILLION of this global population.

So what are our Challenges and Opportunities? I don’t think I need to emphasise that 10 Billion people on our planet will be a lot of people to feed. South Australia’s agriculture, our ability to produce some of the best quality food in the world will be our greatest asset.

In South Australia our agricultural industry has been overshadowed by mining.

It is worth noting though that in 2015, just 12,700 people in South Australia were employed in the mining industry, compared to 40,800 people in agriculture, forestry and the fishing industry.

Predominantly, the majority of people were employed in agricultural primary production.

Nationally, in 2012 the National Farmer’s Federation stated there were 134,000 farm businesses in Australia. That each farmer produces enough food to feed 600 people, 150 at home and 450
overseas. Australian farmers produce almost 93% of Australia’s daily domestic food supply.

Australian farmers export around 60 percent of what they grow and produce, and in 2010/2011 year, our farm exports earned our country $33 BILLION DOLLARS.

Agriculture plays a vital role in Australia, it significantly contributes to our social, economic and environmental sustainability.

But, back to the FUTURE, with a global population of 10BILLION and a projected national population of 42 MILLION what will South Australia look like in 2050?

We need to look at ABS statistics to give us a picture:

If we go back a decade, in 2007, Australia had a population where 14.5 million people were aged less than 50 years. Only 1.6% of the population were aged 85 years or older.

In the year 2050, that percentage is expected to increase to nearly 7%. Most critically though, the greatest challenge we will face will be our workforce participation rate.
Again, a decade ago, as a nation we had 5 working people for every person over 64 years, this will shrink to just 3 people.

For South Australia, the oldest mainland state, we will feel the effect of this even more and for the electorate of Mayo, we will feel it the most. Victor Harbor is the state’s largest township with a population over 75 years, Goolwa and Mount Barker are also within the top 10 oldest townships.

I think it is worth pointing out here, that while we have high quality water and food, our farmers are a population that is aging.

Australian farmers are considerably older than other workers. In 2011, the median age for farmers was 53 years, just 13% of farmers were aged 35 or younger.

We need to ensure, as an industry, it is attractive for young people to enter primary production.

We need to ensure that there are entry points for young people to build primary production business, that they are rewarded for their work and that they have surety of ability to farm in the future and this most importantly includes ability to access water.
I would like to see the Turnbull Government ‘Ideas Boom’ have a regional/rural focus, I believe there is great scope for young people in particular to develop new business opportunities in farming and food production.

The challenge for our agricultural industry, and indeed farmers, will be meeting this booming need for food, both in Australia and globally. Naturally, the expected increase of Australia’s population will put greater pressure on the encroachment of arable land by urban sprawl and competing demand for water.

Our policy makers need to ensure that the policies that they implement support this industry, not make it harder to remain on the land.

With a growing global population, and as developing nations become wealthier with an emerging middle class, we also face increasing pressure of foreign ownership of most arable farm land. The rest of the world will be looking to feed its own countries and investment in Australian farmland has increased considerably in the last decade.
Until recently, the Foreign Investment Review Board threshold was set at $249MILLION, this has recently been lowered to a $15MILLION threshold before the Board needs to approve the sale of a property. The threshold, I believe, is still too high and is a failure to protect our sovereignty. I am not against foreign investment in Australia, but we need to accept that once we sell the farm, it will be near impossible to buy it back.

Nick Xenophon has been very vocal on this issue and moved amendments to the bill that would see scrutiny of foreign ownership step in at agricultural land purchases valued at $5M.

Nick Xenophon has referred in the Senate to the New Zealand framework for foreign investment review which is efficient and clear.

The New Zealand model includes a number of set criteria for the national interest that takes into account the purchase effect on jobs, technology transfers and what the impact will be on the market and the sector more widely. In New Zealand, the national interest test is applied to every prospective foreign ownership sale where the property exceeds 5 hectares of non-urban land.
There is no doubt that as the world population increases the interest and pressure of foreign ownership of our best agricultural land will increase. I would like us to consider a further safe guard, which would provide a 90 day window for agricultural sales to prospective foreign investors to allow a majority Australian owned business or individual to find the funds to match the sale. A prospective sale would need to be advertised in public notices.

By placing the impending sale on public notice and giving a 90 hold to arrange a domestic sale, we will give the best opportunity of prime agricultural land remaining in Australian hands. This will ensure we all have the ability to reap the rewards of sharing our produce with the world for generations to come.

So in closing, we face great challenges, but also great opportunity, but we need that opportunity to be seized by decision makers who will consider the needs of South Australia FIRST, not their faction, not their party, not their donors.
I am honoured to be part of the Nick Xenophon Team as I believe we have, if supported by the people of South Australia, the ability to demand South Australia be counted in Canberra. We can no longer rely on the politics of the past to set a pathway for our future.

Thank you.