

SA's giant battery approaches deadline0:39



South Australia's giant battery being constructed by Elon Musk's company, Tesla, is 50 per cent complete.
September 30th 2017

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WHAT is it about snake-oil salesmen from overseas and our gullible politicians? It seems our leaders can't get enough of billionaires, imported CEOs or spruikers ready to fleece them out of our money.

Those old enough will remember the Pakistani banker Tirath Khemlani, who suckered the Whitlam government during the infamous loans affair. There's been plenty more since but the latest crop can be found in and around Australia's energy crisis.

Take US tech billionaire [Elon Musk](#), in South Australia last week to show off his half-built lithium-ion battery, which he says will save the state from further blackouts this summer. South African-born Musk has perfected the art of using taxpayer subsidies to help build his corporate brands — SolarCity, Tesla and SpaceX.

He found a willing partner Down Under in SA Premier Jay Weatherill, who lost all credibility when the state was shut down last year, with experts predicting it

will only worsen now that Hazelwood, representing 25 per cent of Victoria's baseload power, closed in March. As we all know now, SA relies on Victoria's baseload capacity when its patchwork of renewable sources (frequently) fails to deliver the capacity needed to keep the lights on.



Tirath Khemlani, Pakistan financier who played a key role in the "Loans Affair" which helped bring down the Whitlam Labor government in the mid-1970s. (Pic: News Corp)

Enter Musk and Tesla's battery. It's being constructed in Jamestown with \$50 million from SA taxpayers (see? the subsidy pattern continues). When completed by mid-December, the battery will have a capacity of 100MW, which, at full output, will power 30,000 homes for little over an hour (one hour 18 minutes to be precise).

Considering South Australia suffered a statewide blackout this time last year — and we're talking 638,000 households in the state — the Tesla "solution" would still leave 608,000 homes quite literally in the dark. And let's not forget the remaining business left in the state, which has suffered a significant economic downturn for years now.

But wait, there's more. At the same time as the Turnbull Government announced the creation of a federal government space agency at last week's International Aeronautical Congress, in (you guessed it) Adelaide, Elon Musk took to the stage to spruik his own space travel outfit, SpaceX.

Promising trips to the moon and Mars in the future, he said he planned to launch six advance ships by 2024. There's very little doubt this new agency will involve many more millions of taxpayer dollars to get it up and running and (you guessed it again) SpaceX will be at the front of the queue.

Elon Musk unveils Mars voyage plan1:55



Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk says he's still optimistic for his plans for a manned missions to Mars. September 30th 2017

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See the pattern? Political crisis, chase a big idea, the more implausible the better, throw money at it, import a fast-talking expert to make it sound like it just might work, stall the criticism, fool the voter, survive an election — repeat.

But it is not only South Australia that's planning to throw good money after bad to solve a problem that shouldn't exist in a country like ours with abundant coal, gas and uranium.

Take the boss of AGL, Andy Vesey, and his latest protestations against Malcolm Turnbull's demand that the company extend the life of its Liddell coal-fired power station in NSW or sell it to someone who will.

Despite a commitment that the AGL board would carefully consider the PM's request, Vesey, another highly paid imported CEO, made it clear last month

that Liddell will close. With an electricity calculation that's almost Musk-like, Vesey told his recent shareholders' AGM the bulk of energy lost from the forecast closure of Liddell could come from solar and wind power plants (yet to be built) in NSW and Queensland, as well as a new Tesla-like battery at Liddell.

Given that the battery would be expected to replace the current capacity of the 2000MW coal-fired operation at Liddell, AGL's battery option — a planned 250MW only — would fall a long way short, particularly at those times when the wind doesn't blow or the sun doesn't shine.

Why are we taking the advice of these imported "geniuses" with their so-called solutions that rely on millions in taxpayer subsidies to deliver only a small part of Australia's increasing energy challenge? It seems like our leaders have forgotten our history and the homegrown giants that have made this country great.

Take Sir John Monash, legendary WWI general, engineer and the man responsible for the development of Victoria's rich coal reserves in his time as head of the State Electricity Commission following the Armistice. I know Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg is a long-time admirer of Monash and here's hoping his influence will set Frydenberg straight, particularly as he deliberates the adoption of Chief Scientist Alan Finkel's 42 per cent clean energy target. Melbourne-born and bred, Monash always had Australia's national interest at heart, whether on the fields of France or in the coal-rich plains of Victoria's La Trobe Valley. It's a pity those involved in Australia's energy future today are not more Monash than Musk.

Peta Credlin is a Sunday Herald Sun columnist.

Originally published as [Likes of Musk can smell profit in energy crisis](#)