




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; BETTING TAX BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (2.33 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the appropriation bills. I commend the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the LNP for their budget reply speeches in this House. The Labor government's Treasurer spoke for 24 minutes delivering Labor's debt, taxes and unemployment—although the topic of debt did not receive any specific reference, let alone any indication of how it would be managed. I think 24 minutes is probably the parliament's record shortest budget speech from a Treasurer in recent times. This Labor budget delivers \$2.25 billion of taxes and fees—five new taxes worth \$2.2 billion. It would seem that Labor's election costings some seven months ago whereby they estimated \$491 million would be raised by the four new taxes were grossly underestimated.

In this budget we have a waste tax, a wagering tax on an industry that is already suffering and on its knees, a land tax, a property investors tax and a car stamp duty increase. There are four new fees on veterinarians, home stay regional, labour hire companies and hazard perception. These are all capped off with a higher unemployment rate of 6.25 per cent. I note that the youth unemployment rate in the outback is at an unprecedented 54 per cent. It is extremely disappointing that this government has not acted on that youth unemployment rate. Unlike Labor, the opposition leader has a real plan—a positive plan for Queenslanders to bust congestion, provide cheaper electricity, ensure better health and education services, deliver water security and a guarantee of no new taxes.

I wish to turn to matters of the local government portfolio—an area that is indeed very close to my heart. Queensland's largest local government, the Brisbane City Council, has also brought down a budget. What a contrast it is to this state budget when it comes to debt management. Brisbane City Council has delivered a budget with a lower debt impact on ratepayers. Compare that to the \$83 billion debt bomb from the state Labor government. Labor's debt bomb is costing the Queensland economy \$10 million a day, or \$420,000 an hour, or more than \$7,000 per minute.

Not only is there the debt to pay back—something that Labor seems to have abandoned—but the growing interest bill diverts funds away from necessary infrastructure projects like hospitals and roads. To put this debt in perspective, the quantum of interest payments in one year on this debt equates to \$10 million a day. That could fund the building of 3,650 kilometres of road. That is a distance that is slightly longer than the direct distance from Brisbane to Perth. That is the length of road—Brisbane to Perth—that cannot be built every year in Queensland because taxpayers' money has to be paid in interest repayments on the debt.

There are over 550 hardworking mayors and councillors who will be watching this state budget very carefully. There is already a question about the cut of \$50 million, based on the adjusted budget for 2017-18 compared with the 2018-19 budget. The state government needs to detail to local government why there is this \$50 million funding reduction in the 2018-19 local government SDS papers.

We hear the rhetoric from those opposite about the Great Barrier Reef. The Treasurer said, 'We must clean up the water running into the reef.' Who manages that waste water, the sewage treatment plants in the reef catchment and the urban water quality? It is local councils. If we want to look after the reef water quality, we have to look after the reef councils. It is simple. There is no funding for those reef councils through the Reef 2050 Plan implementation seed funding. Councils already invest their own \$228 million in actions that directly benefit the reef.

I now want to turn to the waste levy, which was originally touted by the Labor government as a way to deal with interstate dumping at Ipswich. From the lack of enforcement, this is now going to cost Queensland businesses and their customers \$1.3 billion over the next four years. This is what Shane Rodgers of the Australian Industry Group had to say about the waste tax—

... a new tax on business in the state dressed up as an environmental initiative.

In terms of the waste tax, this will be implemented through local councils, but support from both councils and ratepayers will disappear if a percentage of the money is hived off for government coffers and not applied to waste management measures. Councillor Mark Jamieson, President of the LGAQ, said in relation to the waste tax—

Councils will also be disappointed that more than 30 percent of the revenue generated by the new waste levy will be channelled into general revenue.

I think the LGAQ are being very hopeful about the figure of 30 per cent.

Mr Crisafulli interjected.

Ms LEAHY: I take the interjection from the member for Broadwater. I think in turn it will be much higher in the future and there will be local governments that will bear the brunt of the ratepayer hostility for this government's waste tax.

Councillor Jamieson went on to say—

On this we are on the side of local communities, who have said loud and clear that they want to see the waste levy money drive innovation not go back into general Treasury coffers.

I keep a bit of a watching brief in relation to two words in the Treasurer's budget speech, and I have been doing that for the last four years. Those two words are 'agricultural profitability'. In the first Palaszczuk government, agriculture did not rate a mention in the Treasurer's speech. In 2016, there was an acknowledgement of agriculture. In 2017, there was a mention of agricultural assets. In 2018, agriculture was punted from the speech. Agriculture did not rate one mention in the Treasurer's speech, and it just goes to show how much this Labor government hates farmers. That is what happens when you speak for 24 minutes: you miss out those very important industries like agriculture. This is what Mike Guerin, AgForce CEO, said about this budget. He said—

Agriculture is one of the pillars of the Queensland's economy and the fastest growing industry in Australia, but has been largely forgotten in the State Budget focused more on big spending infrastructure initiatives in the south-east corner.

True to form, this Labor government has showered taxpayers' money on their greenie mates at the Australian Conservation Council, with \$1.8 million in public funding, but it has provided nothing to compensate farmers who have been left reeling from the unfair and devastating vegetation management laws.

This Labor government talks about a \$17 billion operating budget for Queensland Health, but it cannot find one cent to keep the IDEAS van on the road. The state-of-the-art IDEAS van visits places like Dalby, Charleville, Mitchell, Roma, Quilpie, Cunnamulla and, I might add, a number of communities in Labor electorates such as Townsville, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Maryborough.

Mr Boyce: And Bundaberg.

Ms LEAHY: And Bundaberg. This Labor government cannot find one cent in that billion dollar Health budget to continue the state-of-the-art ophthalmology services that prevent blindness for hundreds of people who now have to travel thousands of kilometres for treatment. The simple fact is that people in my region will go blind and diabetes will increase in regional areas because the state Labor government will not step up with their billion dollar Health budget and provide some funding to the IDEAS van. It is extremely disappointing for those people.

An issue that affects pretty much everyone in my electorate is the ever-increasing cost of electricity. This issue impacts right across the state, and the Palaszczuk Labor government has not addressed the increasing cost in regional areas for business, households, pensioners or, for that matter, local government who are also considerable consumers of electricity. We know from the Hugh Grant report that 50 per cent of an electricity bill is network costs and 47 per cent of that 50 per cent goes directly to the state Labor government. Put simply, this is taken as tax. That is about \$470 a year that is taken from a typical family.

I received a very passionate email from constituents I know well—Emily and Rodney Geiger of the Eulo General Store. It sums up how they feel about Labor’s electricity pricing and taxes. This is what Emily said—

Good afternoon Ann

I wanted to forward you this copy of our power bill which is from 23rd November 2017 to 23rd February 2018 with a total of \$8129.89. Given that this is the most quiet period for our shop, this bill is very difficult for me to pay. I made a point of finding our account for the same period last year. We used more power and paid less for it. As you can see I pay \$200 a week to try to reduce our bill but this is not a drop in the ocean of \$8000.

Electricity prices are just another kick in the guts for small businesses in rural areas. We are currently struggling alongside our local graziers due to the ongoing drought as well as losing a number of people from our community to foreign property investment and property sales for carbon credits. Not to mention the difficulties and expenses involved with freight, which I have discussed previously with you.

We currently have our business for sale and if it does not sell by June, we will be closing the door. This will be sad for the people that do support our business but we simply cannot keep our doors open for a few loyal customers and be slammed with expenses like this.

I fear for Western Queensland’s future, as the changes I have seen in such a short time are nothing short of devastating, especially for those wanting to be out here and trying to have a go.

This is what the Labor government’s electricity policies are doing to small businesses in south-west Queensland in my electorate. As I move around my electorate, I find more and more Emily and Rodney Geigers—good, young people having a go in business only to be slammed with electricity charges, which this government is using as an unfair tax on pensioners, households, businesses and farmers. It gets worse. I table correspondence received by constituents in the Murweh and Barcardine shires that are currently drought declared.

Tabled paper: Bundle of documents, dated 4 June 2018, relating to drought declarations and ineligibility for drought relief electricity rebates in Morven and Alpha [\[909\]](#).

This government, with Ergon Energy, has seriously stuffed up and revoked the Ergon Energy drought declaration for constituents, and this is wrong: these farmers are in drought declared areas. Unlike the government, farmers can actually read a drought map. To add insult to injury, the letter from Ergon says—

While we’re hoping this is good news and you’re now receiving sufficient rainfall, it also means from this date you are no longer eligible for the Queensland Government’s Drought Relief from Electricity Charges scheme.

What a stuff-up! This government cannot organise a chook raffle, let alone an Ergon Energy drought rebate.

We want to address the electricity costs across regional plans. The first part of the LNP plan for cheaper electricity would see the restructure of the government owned power generators from two to three entities. The government’s own modelling shows that creating three state owned generation companies will reduce wholesale prices by more than eight per cent. This is a long-term structural reform that is backed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, as well as small business and consumer advocates.

We heard the announcement from the LNP leader, Deb Frecklington, that a future LNP government will extend retail competition to the whole of Queensland. Regional Queenslanders like Emily and Rodney are being squeezed by an energy market that is stacked against them. We need to change that and the LNP are prepared to do that. Labor for too long has allowed Ergon to enjoy a monopoly in regional areas, despite the Queensland Productivity Commission calling for greater competition outside the south-east a year ago. If elected, the LNP will implement the recommendations of Labor’s own Productivity Commission report into electricity pricing. The LNP will end the massive electricity divide between the south-east and the rest of Queensland. We will help drive down the electricity prices for people like Emily and Rodney and so many others in my electorate.

I wish to speak in relation to the Warrego Highway upgrade program, which is outlined in this budget. This program was agreed to by the former LNP state government and the former federal coalition government. It has not been well managed by the state Labor government. The Chinchilla open level rail crossing was due to commence construction in mid-2017; construction will now commence in June 2018—12 months late. The Dalby to Miles overtaking lanes were due to commence construction mid-2017; construction will now commence in January 2018—six months late. The Miles western access upgrade construction was to commence in late 2017; construction will now commence in May 2018—late again.

The Dalby eastern and western access are both underway. Sadly, during construction this year a child lost his life and another two have been injured. Small businesses along this highway are really suffering from the loss of passer-by traffic. The parking has been disrupted and business takings are

down, and small business have reported to me that they do not know how they will survive these roadworks. The state Labor government needs to make sure that there are no more delays with the Dalby eastern and western access projects because the businesses suffering now will definitely not survive any delays, and many are uncertain if they will survive to the expected completion date of the work in December 2018. There are many other roads in the Warrego electorate that the Palaszczuk Labor government is neglecting but, unfortunately, I will not have enough time to go through them.

(Time expired)