



Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 20 August 2019


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Economics and Governance Committee, Report

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (12.02 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the estimates committee report of the Economics and Governance Committee. The Palaszczuk Labor government's 2019-20 budget was a poor budget for Queensland. It was a budget of higher taxes, more debt, fewer jobs and less infrastructure. So far in this term of government Labor has introduced 10 new or increased taxes, ripping \$3.5 billion from Queensland's economy. That is money from mums' and dads' hip pockets. This even includes a beer tax! That is very disappointing. Quite simply, Queenslanders cannot afford Labor. When this Labor government runs out of money, it comes after yours.

Rather than providing clarity around its financial position, the 2019 estimates hearings were dominated by the Palaszczuk Labor government's ongoing integrity crisis. In the 30 years since the Fitzgerald report was published, these latest scandals raise significant questions about the government's openness, transparency, accountability and integrity that have engulfed the leadership of the Palaszczuk Labor government. In fact, there is a leadership void in the government. It was disappointing that the Premier initially claimed she was unaware—

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order! The member is not taking interjections.

Ms LEAHY: It was disappointing that initially the Premier claimed she was unaware of the \$260,000 taxpayer funded grant to a company of which her chief of staff is a director and a major shareholder. This raises serious doubts about how actively this conflict of interest is being managed, given the decision-maker and the administering body for the grant is a government owned corporation under the control of the Premier. It was clear from the Premier's answers to questions about compliance with the ministerial code of conduct that integrity is not a Palaszczuk government priority.

I move to local government requirements in terms of integrity issues that now stand in stark contrast to that of Labor members of the state parliament. Justifiably, Queenslanders can be concerned that the standards which members of parliament are required to meet are much lower than those for mayors and councillors. Following the integrity issues, in the estimates committee questions were raised about the declaration process applying to a mayor or councillor who owns a property whilst engaged in council decision-making that would directly benefit the value of that property. That sounds a bit familiar, doesn't it? That sounds like some of the news reports we have heard about Palaszczuk Labor government members.

Under the Local Government Act 2009, the maximum penalty for failing to update the register of interest within 30 days is 85 penalty units. If the offence is committed with intent, the maximum penalty is 100 penalty units. If the offence is defined as an integrity offence, if convicted of the offence the councillor automatically stops being a councillor and cannot be a councillor for four years. If the member for South Brisbane were a mayor or councillor rather than the Labor Deputy Premier, she would be facing an alleged integrity offence. One would think that a former local government minister and now Deputy Premier would be well aware of the requirements and of the consequences. I point out that there is weak leadership by the Premier on this issue. To date we have seen no leadership from the Premier in relation to the alleged breaches of the Deputy Premier. Furthermore, when the provisions of the Belcarra bill were first introduced in October 2017 the Premier stated—

Queenslanders should have confidence in transparency and integrity of all levels of government. But I will not make rules for councils that I am not prepared to follow myself, so any changes we make will apply to the state as well as local government.

There is plenty of talk when it comes to local government. It is apparent that the Premier lacks credibility when she will not apply the same levels of transparency and integrity to her own members, including the Deputy Premier.

It was of further concern in estimates to learn of the current workload of the Office of the Independent Assessor. It has a huge workload—far more than what was predicted. It appears that the current staffing resource for this office is only 10 FTEs, while the budget documents indicate that the 2018-19 estimated actual staffing is 16 FTEs. Although the Palaszczuk Labor government has touted and not practised its commitment to openness and transparency, it does not seem to match this with resourcing when it comes to local government. There is a grave concern that a raft of these unresolved complaints against sitting mayors and councillors will still be unresolved in the lead-up to the March 2020 elections.