



Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**


**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL**

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 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (5.57 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the appropriation bills. I wish to thank my electorate for their support at the last election and for the opportunity to represent them for the forthcoming term. I am proud to represent such a large and diverse electorate. I commend the Leader of the Opposition, David Crisafulli, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, David Janetzki, for their budget reply speeches in this House. They have both brought a vision to this House that is focused on Queenslanders.

Queensland was the last state in the nation to deliver a budget in 2020, proving once again that Labor has no economic ambition and no plan. Without a budget Labor has been flying blind through the biggest economic crisis in almost a century. Before COVID Queensland had the highest unemployment rate, the highest number of bankruptcies and the lowest business confidence because Labor cannot manage the economy.

Finally, after 530 days, we have the budget that Queenslanders would have liked to have seen before the state election. The common question that I received in the lead-up to and during the election campaign was, 'How does this Labor government get away with not having a budget?' I was asked, 'Surely there must be some constitutional mechanism to ensure the state government brings forward a budget.' Sadly, there is not because this government uses the parliament as its plaything. Finally we have a budget for this state. It is not a good budget, but at least we have a budget.

Despite promising only \$4 billion in additional borrowings at the state election, debt has now blown out to \$28 billion across the next four years. Before the election Labor told Queenslanders that debt would go to \$106 billion. Just four weeks after the election it has been revealed that it will reach almost \$130 billion. That is a sevenfold increase in borrowings from what Labor promised just four weeks ago. It is another Labor broken promise.

I wish to turn to matters in my portfolio and concerns of the local government sector. Earlier this year, in March, we had the local government elections. Unfortunately, during those elections the performance of the Electoral Commission was lacking. There was a postal vote fail as many people were unable to register for their postal vote applications because the system crashed. People did not get their phone vote so we had a phone vote fail. On the all-important night of the election we had an election results fail. Unfortunately, the committee report conducted by the parliamentary legal affairs and community safety committee into those fails will not be debated in this House because of the state election.

I wish to thank the councils, the Regional Organisation of Councils and the Local Government Association of Queensland for their advocacy in the lead-up to and during the election campaign. Their desire to improve the outcomes for their communities and the local government sector is commendable. However, the local government sector has some disappointments with this budget. It is disappointing that the advocacy efforts of those groups have not been rewarded more strongly in this budget.

Every 80 minutes a water pipe bursts in rural and regional Queensland. There is no funding to address the rural water and wastewater infrastructure cliff that is upon local governments across this state. This matter has to be addressed because if local governments cannot maintain the quality of drinking water we will have a health crisis in many communities.

The Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme has not had an allocation increase since 2014. The Auditor General's Report No. 4 of 2017-18 titled *Integrated transport planning* identifies an estimated \$9 billion renewal backlog for the road network over the coming years. When one looks at this Labor government's lack of investment in inland roads, one can understand why those roads are in the state that they are in and why there are more deaths on outback roads than in any other region. On behalf of the local government sector and rural and regional communities, I will continue to advocate to this government for more investment in our rural and regional roads. Further, I note there has been no commitment to reinstate the Western Roads Upgrade Program in this budget. This is an underwhelming budget when it comes to roads across my electorate.

Whilst I am speaking about roads it is important that I make mention of the second Bruce. That road will pass through Mungindi, Thallon, St George, Surat, Roma and Injune in my electorate. I note that the government intends to work in partnership with the Commonwealth to take trucks off the highway and onto the second Bruce inland freight route. That is going to be interesting as, during the election campaign, Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack said—

The Australian government has a strong \$10 billion commitment to the existing Bruce Highway—money which is already allocated to several upgrades and projects.

Making elections commitments is fine, but when you promise to spend money already allocated to existing projects, you need to be transparent about the communities from which you intend on stripping funding.

There is no 80 percent commitment from the Commonwealth for the second Bruce.

Queensland Trucking Association Chief Executive Gary Mahon said he expected 'probably more in the order of \$2 billion' would be needed to bring the corridor up to the required quality. That is in contrast to the state Labor government's election promise of \$200 million and most of that funding is in the forward estimates beyond 2023-24. This government will have a lot of work to do with the local councils along the proposed route, as there are town bypasses that are owned by the councils. Either the number of road trains passing schools and through town CBDs will increase or the state government will have to purchase the bypasses from the councils or pay road-user charges to the councils.

I now turn to some other issues in my electorate. At the last state election the Premier promised better health services, but she has delivered a system in crisis and, sadly, we see that at the Dalby Hospital. From what I am hearing from constituents, the staff are not being supported to deliver better health services. I have been advised that constituents are discharged at midnight from the Dalby Hospital. One was told to drive for an hour to get home, having been admitted earlier in the day with severe pain. One constituent had no car in which to drive home, but they insisted that he be discharged at midnight. Such patients end up booking into motels at one o'clock in the morning at their own expense. I ask: does the government have a staff shortage or a bed shortage at the Dalby Hospital? Surely the staff can be better supported by this government. Regional maternity services are not even mentioned in the budget, showing that this government does not care about the regions.

Queenslanders deserve a world-class public health system, no matter where they live. That is why I was started the call for a CT scanner in Charleville. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that you have one in Mareeba. A partnership can be developed with Southern Queensland Rural Health to deliver a CT training hub in Charleville, which would benefit many other communities across Queensland. I call on the government to assist with the funding for the business case to develop the service and training model. It might be of interest to the House to know that it can cost up to \$100,000 per month to transfer patients by air from places such as Charleville and Augathella to other centres for head and abdominal CT scans. That is not sustainable in the long term. Charleville is outside the 200 kilometre radius for ambulance transfer, meaning that all CT cases are transferred by air. However, it has come to my attention that air transfer is not always available and very unwell patients have made the dangerous trip by car, risking their lives.

COVID has taken the spotlight off the drought. I for one will shine that light back on the drought, which should be a priority in this budget. Sadly it is not. The drought has intensified across my electorate. There are households out of water and there are property owners out of water. Some property owners are halving their stock numbers and many are returning to supplementary feeding. After this week's heatwave many water supplies will be absolutely decimated and we will be back to a similar level of drought severity as this time last year. Many people are incredibly fearful of dry storms and bushfires burning out what little feed is left.

I say to the government that this is not the time to be cutting the budget for the department of agriculture. It is not the time to be proposing cutbacks to drought assistance, such as those that this Labor government has planned for freight and fodder subsidies. Coupled with the departmental budget cuts of nine staff, this Labor government has cut 53 staff over five years from the department of agriculture. It is just cuts, cuts, cuts all the time when it comes to this government and agriculture.

There are real challenge across South-West Queensland when it comes to housing. The issue of the lack of housing is raised regularly by local governments, employers and real estate agents. Housing for local government employees is needed, housing for small business staff is needed and housing for professional staff is needed. In some of the more remote communities of this state population growth is being held back by the lack of housing.

In Quilpie, the long day care service found it extremely difficult to find accommodation for their staff. Without staff we would have no child care service in the community of Quilpie. People cannot drive for two hours to Charleville to take their kids to the next available service. That is just not practical. In remote communities it is hard enough to find the appropriately qualified staff and attract them to jobs. If communities do not have sufficient housing they are unable to buck the population drift or keep their essential services operating. This government needs to look very seriously at investing in rural and regional communities to increase the housing stock. In my view, this budget does not adequately address that issue.

In the time I have remaining I wish to raise an issue about the state election that I think should be of interest to all members. Some members were elected to this House on very close margins. I spent a lot of time scrutineering in my electorate and there is a matter that needs to be raised. It is not reported publicly that 566 postal ballots were rejected in the Warrego electorate. Those rejected postal ballots are not recorded in the informal count.

**Mrs D'ATH:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui):** There is no point of order.

**Ms LEAHY:** In my electorate, polling booths were closed with no notice because of problems with getting staff. There is a budget concern in relation to the last election, particularly in my electorate. In this election there were more rejected postal ballots—566—than informal ballots—521. Some of these postal votes were rejected for the seal not being torn off the declaration envelope, even though the ballot was in the declaration envelope and the secrecy of the ballot could be maintained. The lack of reporting by the Electoral Commission of these rejected postal ballots is of great concern. I am sure it would concern the 566 people who do not know that their vote would not count. It is not transparent to simply reject these postal ballots without reporting this information publicly. They should be reported, just as the informal ballots are done.

Democracy is enhanced by transparency. At the present time, there are 566 voters who have been denied their say and this has been kept secret. This is not acceptable. Without reporting the rejected ballots there can be no mechanism by which to resolve the problem or even benchmark education campaigns to help reduce the number of rejected postal ballots and enhance democracy. I say to every member of this House: the same thing has happened in your electorate. The secrecy around rejection should be of concern to you all.