




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.43 pm): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (COVID-19) Bill. A global pandemic is sweeping across our world and, thankfully, because of the enormous sacrifices made by Queenslanders, the human toll of this pandemic has been minimised in Queensland. The number of cases and deaths has been far less than in many other countries and we are all working together to ensure that continues, but the economic consequences of this pandemic will not be minimal. They will be huge.

The shock to our economy has been greater than the global financial crisis and the Wall Street crash. Almost overnight, our economy has slumped due to plummeting confidence and is constrained by restrictions that at a time were necessary to slow and stop the virus. In the true Queensland never-say-die spirit, tens of thousands of businesses have found ways to keep going in the face of this crisis. I want to pay tribute to every Queenslander who is working hard to keep our economy alive. As the Prime Minister has said, every worker is essential in this economy.

I also want to recognise the efforts of business owners and managers who have done all they can possible to keep businesses afloat and Queenslanders in work. This crisis has shown that Queenslanders will always put their shoulders to the wheel. These are tough times but Queenslanders are tougher. Sadly, today, we have seen more than 120,000 Queenslanders have lost their job due to coronavirus. Every one of these jobs belonged to someone who was part of a household that is now doing it tough because of this deadly and destructive virus. I want unemployed workers to know that the LNP is with them: you are not alone and you are not forgotten.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg have done the heavy lifting with the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments. The careful financial management of the coalition has given the federal government the capacity to respond. The state Labor government needs to step up and provide more economic support. Some of the measures the LNP have called for have been adopted by the Labor government. However, there is much more work to do to get Queensland working again. The state government is seeking to appropriate almost \$5 billion with this bill, and the LNP will not oppose this measure, with an additional \$3.1 billion this financial year and an additional \$1.6 billion next financial year. Extra spending is necessary to cope with this crisis, but the House is yet to be fully informed about the full hit to Queensland's bottom line. It is not clear how much of this funding can be reprioritised from other government activities that are unable to be undertaken due to coronavirus and how much will ultimately need to be borrowed.

There are significant concerns that over the past five years the Palaszczuk government is still yet to release a credible fiscal and economic plan. The debt continues to climb, despite reductions in infrastructure investment. The categorical refusal to release a budget next week shows the government is flying blind through the greatest fiscal and economic crisis of our time. Because of Labor, our economy was struggling long before the coronavirus outbreak began. This is not just my view or the view of the state opposition; that is the overwhelming view of a majority of Queensland businesses.

All of the statistics underline the economic failure of the Palaszczuk Labor government. Since the Treasurer took up her post in November 2017, Queensland has had the worst unemployment rate in the nation on average. This government's average unemployment rate of 6.1 per cent is far higher than that of Victoria or New South Wales—two states that we used to compete against in jobs and growth. We have the nation's worst record on youth unemployment and long-term unemployment. Queensland also has the nation's lowest business confidence. The December CCIQ Pulse survey revealed Queensland is suffering the lowest business sentiment conditions on record and the lowest profitability levels since December 2010. Remember, this was all before the coronavirus hit Queensland.

As well as the worst unemployment rate and the lowest economic confidence, Queensland has the highest rate of business failures in our nation. More than 10,000 businesses have gone bankrupt during the second term of the Palaszczuk Labor government. No other state in Australia has experienced that level of bankruptcies. Construction in Queensland is 46 per cent below the level it reached under the last LNP government. Business investment is 38 per cent less than it was under the LNP. This is a terrible economic and fiscal legacy for Queensland left by the Palaszczuk Labor government.

Queensland's precarious economic state could have prompted the Palaszczuk Labor government to respond quickly to the coronavirus, but instead the exact opposite has happened. While other states announced support packages for businesses, the Palaszczuk Labor government simply sat on their hands. While businesses were crying out for help—in fact, screaming out for help—this government stayed silent. The Palaszczuk Labor government were the last state government in this country to announce a major stimulus package. The federal Morrison government announced two rounds of stimulus packages before the Treasurer of Queensland even announced one. When it finally did arrive, Labor's relief package did not deliver enough. While the package did contain some measures that the LNP had been calling for, it left out many policies that we still believe must be introduced.

The LNP saw the impending economic crisis well before the Labor government with policies like: lifting the payroll tax threshold from \$1.3 million to \$6.5 million for at least nine months, providing instant relief for 15,000 Queensland businesses—a measure strongly supported by small businesses but only partially adopted by the Palaszczuk government after weeks of inaction; providing small businesses with emergency grants of up to \$10,000 like every other state, but the Palaszczuk Labor government has again failed to do this; providing emergency grants to households who are forced to self-isolate to keep some money coming into the household during this time of distress; providing land tax relief for landholders to ensure they are not the only ones bearing the burden—again, a measure only partially adopted by the Palaszczuk government; introducing price ceilings for electricity and water charges for households and businesses so they do not have to pay even higher bills during this crisis; and paying state government suppliers faster, a policy that was first announced by the LNP and then partially—again, only partially—copied by Labor.

Now is the time for the government to lead by example and help government suppliers with those cash flows. It is something that is relatively easy for the government to implement and it would bring about a great deal of support for Queensland businesses. I plead with the Minister for Small Business and the Treasurer, who are both sitting in the chamber, to listen to the pleas of those small businesses.

Other policies include: fast-tracking \$500 million of local road projects across Queensland to keep people working to guarantee a pipeline of work for the whole construction supply chain to go some way to address the multibillion dollar maintenance backlog that blew out pre coronavirus under the Labor government. Despite Labor's failure to fully back these LNP measures and many others, the LNP will not oppose the bill. However, we will continue to hold Labor to account. Democratic scrutiny is more important now than ever.

Although the Palaszczuk Labor government was the last government in Australia to announce a stimulus package, interestingly, it was the first government in Australia to cancel its budget. The Treasurer and the Premier did not waste a moment when it came to cancelling the budget—slow to start on a stimulus package but the first to avoid scrutiny. At this stage Queensland will be the only state in the nation not to deliver a budget in 2020. Every state government and the federal government have all publicly declared that they will deliver a budget this year. We all know the reason why Queensland is opting out this year. Both the Premier and the Treasurer do not want Queenslanders to see the books before the state election. They do not want to talk about the billions of dollars being squandered and the waste of revenue, the lack of a fiscal buffer for a rainy day or the consequence of the reckless raids on superannuation, long service leave and cash reserves. All of these actions have left Queensland fiscally vulnerable, even before the coronavirus.

Labor does not want Queenslanders to know what the Palaszczuk government failures are costing them. We have already seen the Palaszczuk Labor government rip up our democratic conventions to prevent parliament from doing its job and not support proposals for appropriate oversight of the government's response. Now they are ripping up financial conventions to protect themselves as well.

Again, whilst the LNP will not be opposing the appropriation bill, it again highlights that Queenslanders need strong, effective, principled economic leadership. The lack of financial security due to Labor's poor fiscal management has been laid bare for all to see. What Queenslanders can see is a government that puts itself before its people each and every time. When the worst of this crisis is over Queenslanders must ask themselves some hard questions, and the most important question is: how long can Queensland afford to carry the Palaszczuk Labor government? Labor has cost us too much already. Queensland needs a new government, a government that will get Queensland working again. The LNP is the only side of politics that will get Queensland working again.