



Speech By  
**Deb Frecklington**


**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

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**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Coronavirus**

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.01 pm): The world will never forget the year 2020. So far, the coronavirus pandemic has claimed more than 177,000 lives around the world. Our generation has never faced a threat like this. To deal with this disease, we have changed our lives in ways we never could have imagined. Communities have virtually been closed down, our factories, workplaces and offices are shut, so are pubs, clubs and restaurants. Hundreds of thousands of children have been made to stay at home, and our elderly have been forced to live apart and in many cases alone from their loved ones. Every Queensland family has made huge sacrifices to get us through this crisis. Those sacrifices have not been wasted, because Queensland is beating the coronavirus. I applaud the work of everyone who has helped achieve this result, and I mean everyone. Whether you are a doctor, a nurse, a delivery driver, a policeman or a parent staying at home to teach your children, everyone has made a difference. I especially thank our health experts and our Prime Minister for their leadership. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has led from the front through this crisis. He has been clear, decisive and strong. Queensland has united under Scott Morrison's leadership.

The spirit of ordinary Queenslanders has helped us to stop the spread of the coronavirus in its tracks, but the crisis is far from over. The threat to human life may have been brought under control. My heart goes out to the families who have lost loved ones. But the threat to our economy is greater than ever. So far, all we have tried to do is to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus, and the recovery has not even begun. It will be a very long road back, because the Queensland economy is so weak but it was weak long before the coronavirus.

Under the Palaszczuk Labor government, Queensland got used to having the worst unemployment rate in the nation, the highest number of business failures and the lowest business confidence. We in Queensland already were behind the rest of Australia in this fight. I acknowledge that the state Palaszczuk government has adopted many of the economic measures that the LNP has called for, but many of the positive policies we support have been rejected and the Palaszczuk Labor Government has made some serious mistakes. Our small businesses need a helping hand from the state government like never before, so why is Queensland the only state in the country that does not provide direct grants to our small businesses? The LNP welcomes payroll tax relief but most struggling small businesses do not pay payroll tax to begin with. It is pretty simple. Business leaders have also told the LNP that the limited assistance programs Labor has rolled out are confusing and very hard to access. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Labor must start listening to those small businesses if we are to get through this.

The Palaszczuk Labor government also needs to start listening when it comes to kickstarting businesses in this state. The NRL and the State of Origin are just one example of the Palaszczuk Labor government not working with businesses. The NRL did not want to start playing last weekend. They only wanted to start a discussion with the government about a conditional restart in six to eight weeks. People with experience in the real world know that businesses cannot just restart after being shut down

for six to 12 months. They need hope and the ambition to restart sooner and they need a government to support and share that hope and ambition. That is why the Premier's captain call on the NRL and on the State of Origin was simply out of touch. The state government now needs to be working with businesses to decide what that restart looks like. Tens of thousands of Queensland jobs depend on getting that right.

The one thing we would like to do right now to support our economy is to keep Paradise Dam. It makes no sense to spend \$100 million on lowering the Paradise Dam wall when independent experts say it can be fixed for just \$25 million. Water security and job security are on the line in Bundaberg and in the Burnett and Wide Bay region. Labor needs to work with experts like Dr Paul Rizzo to save Paradise Dam. I promise the people of the Wide Bay that the LNP will work with Dr Rizzo and anyone else who will help save their livelihoods.

The coronavirus crisis is also taking a great toll on our kids. Our young people are largely immune from COVID-19 but their education is being affected. Most parents are seriously concerned by the disruption of our education system. The parents are also confused. They do not understand why schools remain closed to most children when they have seen a significant reduction in coronavirus cases. Let us remember that the medical advice in Queensland has always been that our schools should remain open.

The LNP's position is clear in that we believe that every parent should be able to send their child to school if they want to. If people wish to keep their children at home, they should be allowed to. There is a real danger that our schoolchildren will fall behind. Many parents are simply unable to work from home while also homeschooling their children. It is not just a question of time; it is also a question of the technology available to those parents and those children sitting at home. I am dumbfounded that I have to explain to the Labor government this simple fact—not every schoolchild in Queensland has access to a device. Not every schoolchild in Queensland has grown up in the sorts of families that we are accustomed to. These children do not have devices at home. Children in some areas of my electorate do not even have access to the internet. How does the Palaszczuk Labor government expect them to learn from home?

Even if those children have access to technology and devices, we know that the Palaszczuk Labor government and IT do not mix. The government's website failure has proven that once again, just like it did on day 1 of the homeschooling experiment.

The Premier told us that the education minister was going to come out and talk to parents and the rest of Queensland about that IT meltdown, but the minister spent the day hiding from the press. There was no explanation from her. She sent out departmental bureaucrats to explain. What an example for our education minister to set for our children. The example that the leaders of this state should be setting is that when a mistake is made we should own up to it and apologise. For our school students to learn from the education minister in this state that it is okay to go home and hide, rather than explaining your mistake and apologising for it, is an absolute shame. It is an insult to the parents and it is an insult to the children.

I urge the Premier to make school available to every child. Let us give our teachers the certainty that they are screaming out for. Let us give the principals the resources that they are asking for. It is vitally important that we make sure that we lead on the road to recovery in the state of Queensland. I thank each and every Queenslanders for doing their bit, I thank each and every teacher, just like the Prime Minister has done, and I thank the state's chief health officer who has told us that there is no medical advice to say that our schools should remain closed.