




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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**MINISTERIAL AND OTHER OFFICE HOLDER STAFF AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.55 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Ministerial and Other Office Holder Staff and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As the explanatory notes state, in December 2017 administrative procedures were implemented by the director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Clerk to conduct criminal history checks for ministerial and parliamentary service staff. What the explanatory notes do not state is the reason why these interim arrangements were put in place—why they were hastily rushed in, pending the legislative changes contained in this bill.

With the indulgence of the House, I think it would be a good idea to remind the House why these interim arrangements were hastily rushed in. The reason of course was that the then child safety minister, the member for Waterford, had hired a staff member with a criminal conviction for child pornography. As is always the case with the Palaszczuk government, no apology was made to the vulnerable children exposed to this unacceptable risk.

Rather than taking personal responsibility for the hiring of her own staff, what did the then minister do? The then child safety minister actually blamed the Queensland parliament for her mistake. The LNP will not oppose this bill because, as the last five years have demonstrated, Queenslanders simply cannot trust the Palaszczuk Labor government to undertake the most basic governance measures to ensure government integrity.

The Premier introduced this bill over two years ago—in May 2018. Welcome to 2020! That is a fast-tracked process under the Palaszczuk Labor government! During the Premier's introductory speech, she discussed the serious nature of the incident that led to the introduction of the administrative procedures and how this legislation would resolve the interim measures that were introduced. The fact the Premier introduced the bill over two years ago, following a child pornography scandal that emerged nearly three years ago, shows that the integrity of the Premier's own government is a low priority for her.

During the Premier's introductory contribution over two years ago, she stated that the bill provided powers to assess the suitability of a person to be engaged in a ministerial office. The Premier's definition of 'suitability' clearly did not extend to her own employment of her former chief of staff, David Barbagallo, who still to this day remains under investigation by the Crime and Corruption Commission.

We remember estimates questioning last year with fondness because this year, being the only state in the nation not to hand down a budget, we will not have the estimates process in the state of Queensland this year. What did we discover during the estimates process last year? I remember, because I asked the questions. During estimates questioning last year the Premier's then right-hand man was revealed to be part owner of a company that received a government grant of \$276,000. The Premier's then chief of staff was a director of Fortress Capstone Pty Ltd and one of its major shareholders. The company applied for, and received, a grant from the Palaszczuk Labor government's

Advance Queensland Business Development Fund. Whilst this matter is still under active investigation by the Crime and Corruption Commission, it is telling that the Premier did not dismiss David Barbagallo when this scandal was revealed.

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The bill goes to a criminal history check for staff. It does not go to other issues or suitability, as the Leader of the Opposition is claiming. There is nothing in the bill that makes what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about now relevant because it is about the criminal history check of staff.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order! I am taking a point of order. I will remind members—I have the explanatory notes here in front of me—about the policy objectives and reasons for this bill, and I direct you to that. I see the words 'explicit power to conduct criminal history checks' twice. I remind you to keep that in mind as you are debating this.

Mr POWELL: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. It is a long-held convention that addresses in this House pertain to the long title of the bill. Given the long title includes the term 'ministerial staff', surely the contribution being made by the Leader of the Opposition is well within the grounds of that convention.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: As I have reminded you, it is the long title of the bill, it is committee reports and it is also in the explanatory notes. Bear with me while I have a consultation.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Who said that? Please do not do that again while we are having a conference up here. On that point of order I want to remind people to stick within those limits, as I have said before. We will pay particular attention to people staying within the long title of the bill, particular purposes, explanatory notes and the report.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: As I was speaking to the Ministerial and Other Office Holder Staff and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I would like to mention to the House that if the Attorney-General wished for the long title of the bill to reflect that it is only criminal checks, maybe the government would have liked to have renamed the bill. As the long title of the bill does reflect that, I will continue.

That company applied for, and received, a grant from the Palaszczuk Labor government's Advance Queensland Business Development Fund. Whilst this matter is still under active investigation by the CCC, it is telling that the Premier did not sack her then chief of staff. On this side of the House we know that that is just another example of the Premier's weak leadership, the Premier's lack of integrity and the Premier's lack of ability to fulfil a promise to the House that was made over two years ago. Whether it is waiting over two years for this debate, the Premier's failure to sack her former chief of staff, or the Premier's failure to discipline the member for South Brisbane after a compromising CCC assessment and her involvement in an independent recruitment process, the Premier's failure to sack—

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. The bill specifically relates to the suitability of someone based on a criminal history report. That is what this bill is about. The examples that the Leader of the Opposition is raising in her speech do not in any way go to issues of criminal history checks.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: One moment. On this point of order, the title of the bill does include the words 'for particular purposes' which does draw everyone's attention to the particular matters contained in this bill and not wider policy issues, so I would bring the Leader of the Opposition back to what is contained in the directions I have previously indicated.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The purpose of this bill is to check suitability. I will read directly from the explanatory notes, which state 'checks to assess the suitability of a person to be engaged in a Ministerial Office.' I will speak to that point and I would like to draw the Attorney-General's attention to that point. We are in this place today talking about this issue because of the failure of the integrity of members who have been employed in ministerial offices under the Palaszczuk government's regime. Time and time again we are drawn back into this House to debate issues of integrity, issues of scandal and issues that go to the core of a rotten government.

I say to this House that it is time that we cleaned up the mess, and that is why I am speaking to this bill today. That is why, even though we have had to wait for 2½ years to get to this point, we are speaking on this bill. Why? Because we have to clean up another integrity scandal as a result of the actions of a minister under the Palaszczuk government. I do note that the minister has been placed in a different position, obviously because of failures under her direction as the Minister of Child Safety. I will return to my speech.

Mrs D'Ath interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I beg your pardon?

Mrs D'Ath: Don't you think that is misleading the parliament?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: You are welcome to write to the Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Order! I remind you of the standing order about engaging in cross-chamber chatter. Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is clear that for the past five years the Premier has failed to uphold some of the most basic standards of integrity, and that is why we are here today.

The bill also updates the plan of the parliamentary precinct in the Parliamentary Service Act following the parliament's agreement in 2017 to relinquish a small parcel of land for the Queen's Wharf Brisbane project. I will draw to the attention of the Attorney-General and Labor members of the House that that is also contained in this bill—nothing to do with criminal checks there—so I will talk about this issue which is involved in this bill, because it is quite clear that the Attorney-General, whilst just speaking on the bill, obviously did not have a good look at the whole lot of it.

This bill does update the plan of the parliamentary precinct, which takes us to the Queen's Wharf Brisbane project. This project would not exist if it were not for the former LNP government. This project will transform the heart of Brisbane. That proves that only the LNP can work in partnership with the private sector to build the stronger economy that we need to provide a decade's worth of secure jobs. Queen's Wharf represents an investment of more than \$3 billion. It will create more 8,000 jobs when complete. This project, which started under the previous LNP government, is in stark contrast to the eight tourism infrastructure projects that have failed under the Palaszczuk Labor government. The eight Labor failures have cost 32,000 Queenslanders their jobs.

While the LNP got on and delivered a world-class integrated resort development with the private sector, the Palaszczuk Labor government has spectacularly failed with its half-baked global tourism hubs in both Cairns and the Gold Coast. Queensland will only be open for business once again under an LNP government. Only the LNP will deliver projects like the Queen's Wharf development. We will set up Queensland investment partnerships to work hand in hand with the private sector to deliver at least a billion dollars worth of signed and sealed new public and private projects by 2024. As we did with Queen's Wharf, the LNP will partner—

Mr POWER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member for Nanango asked us to look at the bill and the explanatory notes. I note there is nothing in there to do with the LNP's plans or lack of plans up until 2024. I ask that she be brought back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nanango, could you please stick to the long title of the bill.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Sure. I shall wrap up. In conclusion, as we did with Queen's Wharf, the LNP will partner with the private sector to unleash the potential of Queensland. It is only the LNP that has a plan to get Queensland working again, it is only the LNP that has a plan to rebuild our economy and it is only the LNP that will make sure we create a decade of secure jobs and secure our children's future.