




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (5.08 pm): I rise to support the Appropriation (COVID-19) Bill. We stand in this House today while the word ‘unprecedented’ is used a lot in the most extraordinary times for Queensland, Australia and indeed the world. It is a health and economic crisis the world has not seen before, not one that I have seen in my generation. It has had a severe impact on every generation of Queenslanders, young or old. The term ‘social distancing’, a term I had never heard of or referred to before, seems to be the new way of life for Queenslanders and Australians. Since our last sitting, we have seen our world turned upside down. We have seen our incredible Queensland lifestyle turned upside down. We have seen our economy across the country shaken to its core. No-one could have predicted that 2020 would unfold this way.

Fundamentally, this bill seeks supplementary appropriation for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 financial years of \$4.8 billion. I am proud to be standing here as a representative of the Palaszczuk Labor government. We were the first to recognise the potential of this pandemic crisis back in late January. We planned for it and we have been continuing to plan for its impact, preparing and making sure that we deliver for all Queenslanders. Our Palaszczuk government has front-footed the COVID-19 pandemic from the get-go, from both a health and an economic perspective. It is hard to believe that it has only been 34 days since our last sitting. It has been good to see the bipartisan approach at the federal and state levels and the rapid response to the unfolding economic crisis that is facing our state and our nation and, indeed, the world.

In addition to the Commonwealth JobSeeker and JobKeeper and business cash flow support in Queensland, our government has acted swiftly to deliver for industry, business, households and individuals in these complicated and anxious times for all. This bill ratifies the commitments that our government has made which started on 18 February with the first major relief package of any state or territory government and was the \$27.5 million that was focused on tourism.

I want to touch on the debate that has been had in this chamber today on the situation in relation to Virgin. This issue goes further than tourism, which is a key pillar of our economy. Having two airlines provides price competitiveness. The loss of Virgin goes beyond just affecting its 5,000 employees; it affects the 13 airports across this state, hotels and their support staff, restaurants and attractions that people come to Queensland to visit. It affects transport operators, travel agents and businesses that have the expense on their profit-and-loss statements for their fly-in-fly-out workers doing business here in Queensland, in Australia and overseas and into the future. It is absolutely imperative that we make sure we have a competitive airline industry.

On 17 March we launched our \$500 million concessional loan facility for Queensland businesses, providing loans of up to \$250,000 with an initial 12-month interest-free period. That has been great for many businesses. It has encouraged them to retain staff and assisted in cash flow management. On 22 March we provided funding to the University of Queensland to fast-track the race to find a cure for coronavirus. We know that finding a cure and a vaccine to this coronavirus will be important in how we can move forward as a state and as a nation.

On 24 March we had the single largest relief package at that time that was announced by any state or government. Included within that was a \$1.2 billion health response which looked at the expansion of fever clinics, our emergency departments, providing additional capacity within acute care and more than \$3 billion in economic measures—the industry support package to assist large businesses, which make a significant contribution to our Queensland economy, to help them journey through the crisis at the moment and to make sure that we are positioning for a really bright economic future as we come out of the COVID-19 crisis.

The payroll tax relief package, which I know has been extremely well received in the Redlands, has been terrific. Redlands sits in Brisbane's east. That has meant \$8.8 million worth of financial support to our businesses. The workers assistance package consisted of \$500 million to assist workers who had lost their job with retraining and job matching. Yesterday on the ABC news was a Virgin pilot. He will be one of those people who not just accesses the Jobs Finder portal but will also have the opportunity to transition to future employment. Importantly, there is the microcredentialing, the free short courses from TAFE. In the Redlands there are many people who are interested in taking up that opportunity to look at how they can reskill and position themselves for future employment. There was also the household assistance package of \$300 million. That has been well received in our community. The amount of \$200 off the electricity bill means a lot to many householders. The arts have been significantly impacted. One only needs to look over at QPAC, the Queensland Museum and our own RPAC to see the impact that this has had on that industry. Our \$10.5 million in grants for individual artists and arts organisations is very important.

On 25 March the government allocated \$27.4 million in housing support for vulnerable Queenslanders at risk of homelessness, including providing safe accommodation for vulnerable and homeless Queenslanders and those needing to self-isolate. This was a fantastic package put together by Minister de Brenni. On 26 March we announced \$360,000 to partner with CCIQ to run proactive outreaches to small business and to expand the capacity of their call centre. Everybody in this chamber will have taken numerous phone calls from all types of businesses, small and large. Being able to access information and help and mentoring is what will help many businesses actually survive and thrive into the future.

On 6 April we announced a \$50 million package providing the three-month deferral on gaming machine taxes for our pubs and clubs. Again, that is a really important package. One only needs to look at some of our clubs and their empty car parks to see the impact this pandemic is having on them. Making sure that we help position them to get back up on their feet very quickly is important.

On 8 April we had the boost for domestic and family violence services. For Maybanke, which provides crisis accommodation in the Redlands, and for the Centre for Women & Co., the additional \$120,000 that they received in additional financial support from this \$5.5 million package was invaluable. I spoke to Stacey Ross from the Centre for Women & Co., who said this could be invaluable in providing crisis response to Redlanders. On 9 April the rental assistance grants program was announced, worth \$19.7 million. I know that many in my community in the Redlands are looking at taking that up as they have been impacted by COVID-19. On 12 April we released the relief package to provide free community kindergarten—I took a lot of phone calls on how the community kindergarten is important to our whole Redlands community—to make sure that our essential workers are able to have their children still in kindy and to make sure that our kindies are still able to operate as we journey out of this COVID-19 crisis. They are important assets to our community. On 14 April we boosted grassroots community based healthcare providers that had been impacted to the tune of \$28 million.

On 25 March, the parliament having sat the week before, I had the opportunity to be involved in another new normal for many, which is Facebook Live. I did an update with our Redlands Coast Chamber of Commerce and our local businesses. It is really important, and it is part of our role, to make sure that we provide the best information. The gravity of COVID-19 in our communities is far-reaching. It is impacting so many different aspects of our lives and the way that we function and operate. Being able to assist those organisations get to the truth and provide the information that they need to move forward is really important. I spoke with Rebecca Young, the president of our Redlands Coast Chamber of Commerce, who commended our government on the stimulus and support packages, saying that it goes a long way to giving confidence to businesses in the Redlands.

These additional appropriations represent a commitment to my Redlands community and to all Queenslanders, a commitment that we will be with them all the way, to support our collective journey through this crisis and into recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. I commend this bill to the House.