




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.25 pm): With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to pass on my prayers and condolences to Tim Mulherin's family, his wife, Erin, and the three boys. Tim was a fantastic member of parliament and a great friend of mine for over 25 years. I would also like to just quickly wish Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay; Simone Wilson, the member for Pumicestone; Mark McArdle, the member for Caloundra; Minister Kate Jones; Minister Anthony Lynham; and Minister Coralee O'Rourke all the best in the future.

I will not be opposing these urgent appropriation bills because this is a very tough time for many Queenslanders and their families. Not only are they struggling with the social and financial impacts of the coronavirus pandemic but they are also having to cope with the constant changes and intrusions of the Premier and health minister into their family lives, businesses and places of work. Queenslanders have been very patient in bearing this burden, and they do not deserve to have any further burdens imposed by this administration. However, while I am not opposing these bills, I do want to use my time to highlight just what is happening here for the benefit of my constituents back in Gregory.

Normally, an appropriation bill is introduced to this House and then referred to the committees of review. This is what we call estimates. The committees thoroughly investigate the expenditure department by department, minister by minister. I would also like to acknowledge the member for Clayfield for bringing up some important information with regard to these appropriation bills. The committees then report back to the House and the committee reports are debated before the Appropriation Bill is voted on. This year, because of financial developments in terms of revenues and expenditures relating to the pandemic, the federal, state and territory governments have all delayed their budgets. These will begin to be delivered from 6 October through to November.

However, the coronavirus is not the only budget concern in Queensland: there is an election, and voters therefore need to be informed. Queenslanders will be voting in the state's first fixed election on 31 October. A responsible government with nothing to hide would understand the need to bring down a budget before election day. To do anything else is undemocratic. It will deceive voters, whether deliberately or not. They will be voting without the full information they deserve.

I was astonished to hear the Treasurer say in the first reading on Tuesday that he would deliver the proper budget on 30 November. Producing a budget is not like making scones. You just cannot whip it up. If the Treasurer is able to deliver a budget in November, just weeks after the election, I strongly suspect it is already sitting on a computer in his department. It is just another mean and tricky use of COVID-19 for political purposes. The cutback in parliamentary sittings is the same and is prompted by the same motivations of secrecy and hiding Labor's woeful record in the administration of governance over the last five years.

If the motivation behind the lack of parliamentary sittings is truly health based, then all regional MPs should be able to attend virtually. Instead, we are just supposed to travel less from our COVID-free electorates to Brisbane. Travelling less is supposedly enough to keep us all safe, including members, our staff, our families and all of the constituents we meet with and assist. What nonsense! These parliamentary sittings have been cut so the government does not have to face scrutiny and examination. They are using COVID-19 as a political raincoat.

Even so, if the budget is ready—or even nearly ready—and the Treasurer wanted to keep his May promise to Queenslanders about giving them the financial information they need before the election, he could have introduced budget bills at the last sitting in August. That would have given the committees a full month to examine them and we could have been debating the resulting reports this week. Instead, the Treasurer released a 41-page brochure on Monday and moved an urgency motion on Tuesday. This is not a budget; it is an economic statement. There are no economic forecasts beyond nine months, and the only economic commitments are to projects that have already been announced. It is in no way a comprehensive document and it is certainly not a budget, nor is it a plan.

Months ago, when the Premier was put under pressure about this lack of transparency, the Premier promised that Labor would hold an open examination about the lack of a budget and Queensland's financial position before the election. With that promise on the public record, what have Labor done to handicap any scrutiny of their financial record? This Friday, after parliament has risen—tomorrow—the Premier and the Treasurer will make themselves available to the Economics and Governance Committee for three hours. That is right—for three hours. The Premier has graciously spared an hour of her time and the Treasurer is giving the committee two hours. Let us be honest though. If you put in the Dorothy Dixers, it is half an hour for the Premier and an hour for the Treasurer, with no access to directors-general or any senior bureaucrats. Clearly, this is a whitewash. It is a box-ticking exercise so Labor can say, 'We've been open to scrutiny.' They have not been open to scrutiny.

There are issues I would love to have an opportunity to probe. As the shadow minister for fire, emergency services and volunteers, I have major concerns in every area. We have no clarity around funding for Volunteer Marine Rescue and coast guard at the moment in the Blue Water Review. Where is that promise? Where is sorting that out as a legacy? The minister has claimed that he will sort that out. He has not sorted that out. What about Rural Fire Services or the SES and the review there? Where is the funding towards that? Even Queensland's surf lifesavers do not know where they stand in terms of funding their vital services this summer. Apparently, their funding goes until 31 December, but summer goes well into March and they are needed on our beaches as we try to encourage more people with domestic travel and domestic tourism to the Gold Coast, to the Sunshine Coast and right up to Far North Queensland.

As the member for Gregory, I have a feeling that cuts are being made in health care for my constituents, but we cannot see them because there is no budget. I do not know if the mobile BreastScreen service is still running. I do know that the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service is removing housing assistance for doctors. I am predicting that will lead to an inability to fill doctor vacancies and we will be back to the bad old days in terms of health care for my constituents. The Labor Party are cutting funding out of the Central Queensland health budget. They are taking away valuable accommodation services so we can keep long-term doctors in the Central Highlands. My constituents have questions about funding for roads and education. With no budget and no estimates, there are no answers.

What do we know as we stand here debating these urgent bills? We know that before coronavirus Queensland had the highest unemployment rate, the largest government debt and the lowest business confidence in the nation. We know that Labor's \$18 billion single-year blowout in debt will lead to another 72,000 Queenslanders losing their jobs. This is on top of the record 234,000 Queenslanders who are currently out of work. With these bills, Labor is essentially seeking another \$28 billion from Queensland taxpayers, no questions asked—in other words, a blank cheque. The nation is facing the greatest financial crisis in 75 years and we know that, going into this crisis, Labor's fiscal mismanagement had put Queensland on the worst possible footing to deal with this crisis. Now we know there is no calm, considered plan on how to get us through this situation we find ourselves in.

Queenslanders are being asked to take Labor on trust, but their record is not one to inspire us at the moment. There has been scandal after scandal, blowout after blowout. The Treasurer has been at lengths to put distance between himself and the former treasurer. Voters cannot be blamed for withholding their trust at the ballot box come 31 October. Even without a budget, there is a five-year record they can base their judgements on. It is not a record that recommends Labor as financial administrators or as a government committed to good governance and democratic transparency.

There is no reason why the Labor government could not hand down a budget before the election. Basically, we are the first government in history I believe that will go to an election without handing down a budget. The government says that the federal government have not handed down a budget, but they are not facing an election for another two years. We are facing an election on 31 October, and the government does not have the decency or the financial transparency to put a budget in place so people can judge the Labor Party on its record and find out where the financial transactions are going. Why can't the government put a budget in place? The government is going to an election without a budget and that is an absolute disgrace.