



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

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 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.46 pm): I rise today to speak to the cognate debate on the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2020 and the Appropriation Bill 2020. I am a member of the Economics and Governance Committee which, sadly, will not get to scrutinise this expenditure before this House considers it. I pay tribute to the deputy chair, who was the first, last, only and best mayor of the Albert shire. He likes me to mention that in every speech related to our committee.

A couple of speakers on this side of the House have raised this point, but the debt Queensland is being burdened with under this Labor government is out of control. The announcement that it is expected to reach \$102 billion is absolutely staggering. Our economy is in a frighteningly weak position as we head further into this recession and that will only mean it will take longer for Queensland to recover. Even the government's Productivity Commission—once flaunted by them as being independent but, as we heard this week, that will no longer be—pointed out the government's failings in one of its most recent pieces of research work, *Building economic resilience in Queensland*. That report states—

In the last five years, Queensland has experienced an employment-to-population ratio well below its pre-GFC peak levels, slipping below the national average for the first time since the early 1990s.

This bill itself is to fund the \$1.114 billion of unforeseen expenditure of 13 departments in the 2019-20 financial year, although we have no detail at all on any of this spending. Given this is pretty well in line with other years of Labor's overspend, they cannot blame this on COVID. The parliament already approved the \$3.181 billion in April through the COVID appropriation bill to deal with, primarily, the health response. Last year the overspend itself was \$1.397 billion, the year before it was around half a billion dollars and the year before that it was \$2.273 billion. This mismanagement of the hard-earned dollars of Queenslanders is not acceptable and we cannot keep going this way.

There is nothing to be released through this, apart from the 41 pages we received on Monday on debt and, of course, this bill, other than the many light-on-detail ads we see across our newspapers and social media. The other day I think I even saw one on a bus stop in my area. We are in the dark not only about how this government thinks it will get us out of COVID-19 but also about the devastating position our economy was in before it hit. This year we have no QTRIP or Service Delivery Statements—absolutely no detail. Queenslanders are none the wiser about the government's plans or about any of the specifics of what their money was spent on in the past year. The figure within this bill is \$1.114 billion. That figure means something. It is not something for us just to sign off on; it has an impact on every Queenslanders we represent.

In Bonney, we had the highest unemployment on the Gold Coast before COVID hit. Obviously, it is now worse. Those who have lost jobs or are at risk of losing their jobs because they cannot continue in them due to the border closure—I am hearing many stories of this—are absolutely terrified. What

hope do we offer them? What will be available to them when our economy is this weak and there is such a low level of business confidence? The Productivity Commission report I referred to earlier summarised it well. It states—

A return to pre-crisis economic growth will leave the economy running below its potential, limiting growth in the living standards of Queenslanders.

Perhaps this is why the commission is no longer independent and why it is being brought within Treasury. This government does not like to hear criticism, and when it does it silences it, shifts the goalposts, goes on the attack or blames an LNP administration that left office almost six years ago. At the time of its establishment the then treasurer stated—

... the resulting recommendations will contribute to the development of new policies aimed at boosting economic growth and delivering higher living standards for all Queenslanders.

Yet when the commission does its job—to report on how well the government is doing at delivering this—and when the government does not like the answer it gets, it takes away the commission's independence.

We call for sensible investment, not overspending like this, particularly when there is no detail. In my electorate of Bonney, covering the best parts of the Gold Coast, we need more police. We need upgrades to our ageing school facilities. We need jobs created through a fully realised Gold Coast health and knowledge precinct to diversify our job market and to welcome in investors. We need a second M1. After six years of this government, we do not even have a business case for this. We need a way to get the growing population of Gold Coasters moving easily between suburbs without jumping on a National Highway to go anywhere and a plan that considers the local residents living alongside it. We need to improve our public transport systems and access to them. It is essential in our growing city and it is the only way we will not be stuck with years of congestion in terms of managing growth sustainably. We need a state contribution to the highly congested Brisbane Road-Captain Cook Drive-Pine Ridge Road intersection, for which the Gold Coast council has money on the table.

As my colleagues do, I understand that we are in a global pandemic and that that will be a hit to our economy, but we were in such a fragile position before COVID hit that we have an even longer road ahead to recover. The LNP is ready to get Queensland working again. Our fiscal principles are clear. We will strive to be the lowest taxing government in the nation by guaranteeing no new taxes and a 10-year royalty freeze. We will target fiscal balances across the economic cycle by limiting general government expenditure to less than revenue. We will stabilise and begin repaying Labor's debt with a target of regaining the state's AAA credit rating. We will set improved standards in public service delivery and accountability across the whole of Queensland. We will build the job-creating infrastructure Queensland needs to boost state growth and improve productivity. Only the LNP can truly help Queensland recover from this pandemic and get Queensland working again.