




Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 22 April 2020

### **APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (12.56 pm): Following on from the contribution in this debate from the Leader of the Opposition I would like to remind the House that Queensland was the first state to make emergency declarations in relation to COVID-19. In fact, we were one of the first states to come out with our initial stimulus package of \$27 million for industry. We heard nothing from the opposition about support for industry at that time. We had a \$27 million package out the door before any other jurisdiction, followed up by a half a billion dollar announcement on low-interest loans, followed up by a \$4 billion economic stimulus delivered by the Premier and the Deputy Premier.

I thought it was important for the House to be reminded that Queensland has been leading the country in response to the health crisis and the economic crisis. In these unprecedented times we have to be ready to take unprecedented steps to protect Queenslanders, protect Queensland's small businesses and protect Queensland jobs, and that is exactly what we are doing.


This Appropriation (COVID-19) Bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation to be presented in this House. It will ensure the government can fund the extraordinary measures we have introduced to soften the significant impact of COVID-19. In short, this bill enables us to implement the critical lifelines for those of our fellow Queenslanders who have lost their income and their job. The scale of the response needs to be appropriate to the scale of the problem.

The Palaszczuk government has responded with unprecedented relief measures to support businesses, workers and families. A key part of the \$4 billion economic stimulus was the \$500 million worker assistance package to connect Queenslanders to jobs and, most importantly, training. Projects under this package will target initiatives to create and support employment opportunities and remove barriers to employment. I am pleased to say the first phase of this, the \$10 million Jobs Finder Queensland portal, has been up and running for a week and has already attracted almost 3,000 registrations, and a majority of those registrations are Queenslanders who have lost their job within the last month. This initiative helps connect jobseekers to the jobs that industry needs right now.

Dominique Lamb from the National Retail Association has said that this initiative is critical to getting people who have lost their job back into the workforce, spending money in the economy and helping to save jobs elsewhere in Queensland. The benefits of this initiative do not stop at those we help. It also helps their local neighbourhoods and communities. Our priority is moving those who have lost their jobs into jobs that we know are in demand, particularly in health care, agriculture, food production, transport, cleaning and resources. Critically, this Jobs Finder portal also provides links to new free, online training for Queenslanders who have been impacted by this crisis. Jobseekers and small businesses can upskill and reskill through free courses and short courses to make sure they are ready to fill the jobs we need now and in recovery.

Ninety-nine per cent of registered jobseekers have indicated that they want to retrain and rejoin the workforce. Our free online training courses consist of short, targeted skill sets—courses for those who want to learn new skills in a matter of weeks and be employed in the industries where we need workers.

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 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (2.58 pm), continuing: I was saying before the break that our free online training courses, short targeted courses and skill sets are available now for Queenslanders without having to enrol in a full qualification. Two days ago a total of 2,311 enrolments were registered, with over 5,000 expressions of interest to undertake skill sets. Queensland's small businesses employ almost one million Queenslanders. We know that they are now especially vulnerable to the financial impact caused by COVID-19. We understand the severity of this threat, which is why we were the first—the first—jurisdiction in Australia to announce a recovery package. This bill supports that package.

In terms of economic impact, the novel coronavirus is a disaster like any cyclone, bushfire or flood, but of course with a much wider spread and prolonged repercussions. As with any disaster, we are responding with financial assistance and statewide support, and the scale of our support fits the scale of this disaster.

The Palaszczuk government has engaged with industry since the start of this crisis, and our several packages respond directly to their pleas. We are making sure that we are doing everything we can to support Queensland businesses with payroll tax, rent relief and a \$500 million loans facility. As at the beginning of the week the loans scheme supported almost 17,000 jobs through nearly 1,200 approved loans. We are providing free financial resilience webinars and online mentoring-for-growth sessions to connect small business operators directly to experienced business mentors. These sessions are providing operators with the opportunities they need to change their business strategies and ensure they maintain much needed cash flow.

Some of the feedback from the small businesses that have engaged in these sessions has been wonderful. On 8 April there was a session in Townsville and one of our businesses provided this feedback. They said, 'I was feeling very deflated about my business, but after speaking with you last Thursday I feel excited about the future. It was great to have someone who can see the business from outside with fresh eyes. Thank you.' We are getting this feedback right across Queensland. More than 5,400 small businesses have contacted my department's small business hotline to find ways to help mitigate the impact of this crisis. We are helping small businesses transition and move online, change their business models and develop new products. I am determined to ensure that those businesses that are moving online to takeaway or home delivery mode do not have their already slim profits eroded by delivery fees. As our packages and support services are rolled out we will continue to review and respond to Queensland's small businesses and displaced workers.

The impact of COVID-19 is not just being felt in some distant, little-known place; it is being felt by our neighbours, friends and families. It is at our doorstep and we are seeing and feeling its impacts. The Palaszczuk government is taking unprecedented steps because we are in unprecedented times. It is absolutely essential that, no matter what happens, we keep our small businesses open, keep people in jobs and make sure we come out of this crisis stronger and more resilient. I support this bill.