




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.51 pm): I would like to compliment the member for Redlands on her pink jacket. I fear that we may clash after lunch—be warned. I rise to speak in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. I thank the Treasurer, who has helped steer us through the economic recovery required to counter the disastrous effects of COVID-19. The stimulus packages have cost our government over \$2 billion to date. Every cent was absolutely necessary to help all of those affected.

I wrote this speech on a Virgin flight while travelling here. I gave thought to how we saved that airline with part of the stimulus package. Thank goodness we did. If we did not, there would be an airline monopoly in the regions and we would have to pay ridiculous prices. I thank the Treasurer for that. I know that regional Queensland thanks the Treasurer for his efforts to avoid that awful situation. It was a bit of a shame that the Leader of the Opposition did not have the vision or backbone to back the thousands of workers of that airline and to help save Virgin, which is now repaying the people in Queensland in spades.

I support this bill because it is all about protecting Queensland from the LNP agenda to cut, sack and sell. When I was elected, my community was hurting because of the LNP's cuts. They told me that they wanted to see good frontline services restored. We saw that nurses and police were sacked—sorry, made redundant—and many more in Townsville and other areas were impacted by the former LNP government under Campbell Newman and then minister David Crisafulli, now Leader of the Opposition.

I was acting officer in charge of Townsville QAS station. I pick up the term used by the member for Redlands: the 'box man'. Our entire front office was sacked. Our first-aid providers were sacked. I want to put a human face on this. We had a baby capsule fitter, Dennis. He made sure that the capsules the QAS used to hire out kept babies safe. I had been to jobs where parents or grandparents had succumbed. It was disgraceful that that service was cancelled. I recall that in 2014 Dennis came into work and just broke down when telling me that he had lost his job. These cuts affect real people. I will never forget Dennis coming in and sharing that experience. That single job cut made a lot of people angry, including Johnathan Thurston, who had his baby capsules fitted by QAS. He started a petition that was signed by lots of angry mums. The irony is that baby capsules used by the family of the Leader of the Opposition were fitted by Dennis, but as a cabinet minister he made sure that Dennis's job was cut. What price do you put on that? The current Leader of the Opposition sat around the cabinet table and agreed to those cuts.

Labor makes sensible, prudent savings in a way that does not hurt Queenslanders. The savings that this bill supports will ensure our frontline services are sustainable and are focused on the needs of the public. The LNP hate that idea, because when the LNP talk savings they mean cuts, just like when they were in government, when they cut 14,000 public servants—4,000 health workers, 1,800 midwives. The LNP cut the infrastructure spend to record lows. Under the former government, in Townsville we had one-tenth of what we have put into our city. It was less than \$100 million for Blakey's Crossing. We

have put a billion dollars into infrastructure in Townsville, with the Queensland Country Bank Stadium—hopefully to host an Origin game—Townsville Port, the Haughton water pipeline and, of course, Riverway Drive.

It is no wonder the LNP complains about putting the Titles Registry in the Future Fund, because it means it cannot sell off the Titles Registry. The Titles Registry will be secured in public ownership. Should the LNP ever again get the opportunity—God help us—to govern in this state, it will not be able to sell it. The LNP hates the idea that Queensland taxpayers will get the full value of the Titles Registry on our balance sheet. By getting that asset onto our balance sheet and offsetting debt, it completely removes the LNP's fake arguments on privatisation.

The good people of Thuringowa certainly do not support privatisation of the state's most strategic assets like our very own Townsville port, which the LNP tried to sell off. The people of Townsville saw straight through the LNP's devious plan. That is why I was elected in 2015. We all know that privatisation is in the LNP's DNA. We know that this is true because in government it tried to sell our electricity assets and ports and wasted \$70 million of taxpayers' money on consultants with its famous Strong Choices. I thought it should more aptly have been named 'Worst Choices'. To try and pull the wool over the people's eyes, the LNP will say or do anything to justify its agenda to cut, sack and sell. The LNP complain about debt, even as the Morrison government's debt increases beyond a trillion dollars. As the member for Mundingburra said, there is absolute silence and no criticism of that.

The LNP complains about debt even though the New South Wales Liberal government has a higher debt than Queensland, including when measured on a proportional basis. The LNP complains about debt not because it believes debt is a problem but because it wants to use it to justify cutting, sacking and selling. I feel another version of 'Worst Choices' is coming to the people of Queensland again. How many people will the LNP sack next time?

This bill provides \$3 million in direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and other ancillary costs. Some \$3 million may not sound like a great deal of money to the LNP, but it means a lot to my community. That can make a lot of difference when invested, such as in the school upgrades I am getting in my electorate. Importantly, \$3 million in direct savings is only one part of the government's broader \$3 billion savings agenda. It is no wonder the LNP is angry about abolishing statutory bodies, because one of those bodies was set up so that it could do more privatisation. Everyone knows the PSBA was set up so the LNP could sell it off. The LNP is angry that the PSBA is being abolished as it will affect its plans to flog it off should it ever get back into government—God help us. God help Queensland if that ever happens! Privatisation is in their DNA.

Building Queensland and the Productivity Commission have served Queensland well, but now it is time for their work to continue inside government agencies to help support our recovery and save money. The bill provides a fee unit model that will reduce costs for Parliamentary Counsel as it goes through the annual fee unit indexation. Queenslanders will remember how the LNP set up indexation of fees and charges at 3.5 per cent regardless of inflation, meaning fees and charges rose in real terms. Under the LNP government, fees and charges increased by 3.5 per cent each year. Over three years that is a nearly 11 per cent increase in the costs of interacting with government under the LNP, but Labor brought those fees down—first, to 2.25 per cent, then to 1.8 per cent and now to 1.7 per cent, the lowest indexation rate in more than a decade.

Governments have to move with the times. The reality is that people in my community increasingly get their news online. I commend the bill to the House.