



Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill

State Development and Regional Industries Committee, Report

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (3.05 pm): I rise to contribute to committee report No. 2. Whilst the LNP opposition agrees with passing the budget, we do hold concerns about the Palaszczuk Labor government's 2020 budget. Debt is increasing by more than what the Labor government promised prior to the election. The government outlined \$4 billion worth of debt before the election, only to reveal the actual increase in debt would be seven times that amount.

While the opposition understands the need to borrow funds to build critical infrastructure like roads, dams and other job-creating projects, we are extremely concerned about the revelations in the budget which show the massive increase in debt has yielded only a tiny increase in the state's net worth. This is in stark contrast to the results in other states where those states have used increased borrowings to fund large infrastructure building programs and jobs in their states.

There is a failure in this budget to address Queensland's high unemployment rate. Queensland has one of the worst unemployment figures in the country. More than 200,000 Queenslanders who are currently out of work were looking to this Labor government to help them—the battlers out there, the mums and the dads; instead, they are disappointed. There is no fast-tracking of projects to stimulate the economy and jobs. There is no shortage of road infrastructure across this state that could do with investment in repairs. There are communities that are still having drinking water carted to them—like Cambooya and Stanthorpe—so those residents can have household water.

Mr Weir: Clifton.

Ms LEAHY: Clifton. I take the interjection from the member for Condamine. The government is out there paying to cart drinking water to these communities. That is showing the failure of investment in infrastructure by this government.

The estimates committee process was a highly politicised process that lacked transparency. The structure of the whole budget process is fundamentally broken. It was a vastly truncated estimates process, and I can remember when we used to have portfolios that would have questions for a whole day, not just an hour. With that truncated process, the government had a responsibility to ensure it was completely transparent. Instead, the Queensland public were served a dysfunctional sideshow of highly politicised estimates committee hearings.

That brings me to questions on notice and the lack of information provided—in particular, in relation to the local government portfolio. The information that was requested through questions on notice has been provided to previous estimates committees, particularly in relation to those programs that are funded by the local government department. The government chose the timing of the budget, and they are now using excuses to hide information that has previously been provided to this parliament. There is no good reason why that information should not have been provided again in this estimates committee process. It shows the arrogance of this Labor government who think they can disregard the parliament and the parliamentary processes and committees. It again shows the lack of transparency and openness of the Labor government and the Labor government's disregard for accountability when it comes to the use and direction of taxpayers' funds.

Further, the government was unable to offer any assurances that costs incurred by local councils in administering the state government's extensive border closure policies would be reimbursed. These costs included accommodation and toilets for police manning these closed crossings in remote areas and constituted a significant burden on those councils along the border, particularly those councils that are described as financially distressed and have a limited rates base.

It has proved difficult for those councils to cover the costs through the COVID Works for Queensland program because applications for that program closed on 12 June 2020. The borders reopened on 1 December 2020 and they would have been unaware of the full costs incurred and the length of time they would be required to fund those border facilities. It is a bit hard to put in a costing for a program that has closed when you do not actually have the full costings because the border has continued to be closed six months past that date.

To claim, as the government did, that councils would have to fund the state government's border closure expenses from the Works for Queensland grants ignores the range of council projects that required additional funding and effectively changes what is an untied grant program to being a tied grant program. The border closures and their funding could in no way be regarded as part of a measured stimulus program—or maybe that is what the government thinks that is in some areas—when the focus of the COVID Works for Queensland was about stimulus in those communities. The imposition of state government policy had to be funded by councils without consultation, and that is a cost shift.