



Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Economics and Governance Committee, Report

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (3.36 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2021-22 budget estimates report from the State Development and Regional Industries Committee. It was very disappointing that there was limited time available for non-government MPs to ask questions. I can remember when entire portfolios had a whole day to ask questions of ministers. Once again, time was wasted as budget estimates hearings were characterised by constant interruptions and points of order from government MPs. Former Labor Speaker of the Legislative Assembly John Mickel—

Mrs Frecklington: What did he say?

Ms LEAHY: I take that interjection. He once called the estimates process a 'protection racket'. There is no doubt that urgent reform is needed to ensure ministers can be held to account through free-flowing questions and answers, as budget estimates was intended.

There are 77 Queensland councils that employ almost 40,000 people in Queensland and manage \$108 billion in assets, including over 153,000 kilometres of local roads and \$25 billion of water and sewerage assets. However, in this estimates committee hearing, there was only 60 minutes of question time for government members and opposition members to ask questions about matters of importance in the local government portfolio area. This just shows the lack of importance that this Labor government places on the local government sector.

At the time of the estimates committee hearing, the Labor government was not able to provide any assurance to local governments with respect to appropriate compensation for assisting with border closures. The cost to councils for assisting the state government is in the order of \$631,000 for the previous border closures. The Paroo Shire Council, described by the Auditor-General as financially unsustainable, have had to expend 16 per cent of their general rate income to meet the cost of the previous border closures. There are approximately 1,000 roads that councils assist with in the management of border closures. Finally, we are hearing that after sustained pressure from the opposition—two years of questions in estimates—the government has mooted that there might be a border fund to assist councils with the state government costs that have been cost-shifted on to councils.

Given this Labor government's track record on taxes—for instance, the waste tax, the wagering tax, land tax, property investor tax and car stamp duty—the LNP remains concerned that Queenslanders will be slapped with a wheelie bin tax at the beginning of the next financial year. It is of

concern to councils that the Budget Strategy and Outlook document only lists the advance waste payments for 2021-22. That means there is no further commitment beyond this financial year. Councils rightly fear they will have to pass on the cost of the waste levy to households after June 2022 in the form of a rubbish tax.

With respect to conflict of interest issues, several examples were outlined by the LNP in relation to concerns raised by mayors and councillors. Improvements to conflict-of-interest laws are desperately needed so that mayors and councillors can once again be empowered to act in the best interests of their communities.

Again under pressure from the opposition, the government has advised they are looking at some changes; however, these are still up to six months away. The transcript shows that the committee did not hear any declaration about the chair's union membership in the CFMEU at the start of questions relating to union influence. The chair declared his membership when prompted by opposition members. Just as well he was not back in his former role as a councillor, as the outcome of his day may have been very different.

I note the omission of the Office of the Independent Assessor in schedule 7. Schedule 7 lists the entities to which direct questioning of chief executives at estimates is to apply. The Office of the Independent Assessor was omitted this year. Does this omission by the government have anything to do with the use of division 5 notices issued to newspapers and journalists? Reducing parliamentary oversight of the Office of the Independent Assessor only seeks to reinforce the view that this government is indeed conducting government in the dark. Queenslanders who pay their taxes have every right to expect more from this Labor government's budget and greater oversight through the estimates committee process.