




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (3.03 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. This bill amends several acts and it is a comprehensive reform of the business and balance sheet of the Queensland government. The Debt Reduction and Savings Bill is designed to do exactly what the title says. The Palaszczuk government has looked at savings across a number of areas and at debt reduction so we can invest in services that matter to Queenslanders. We do not want to cut frontline workers such as our doctors and nurses or any other first responders, whether they be police, fire and emergency services or ambulance staff.

Throughout our term in government we have restored and continue to invest in frontline services and we will continue to do that in this term. The people of Queensland have trusted that our government, the Palaszczuk Labor government, will always back our frontline workers. At the last election we were elected on that platform. We will deliver 5,800 nurses and midwives, 1,500 doctors, 475 paramedics, 2,025 extra police personnel, 357 extra firefighters, 6,190 new teachers and 1,100 new teacher aides. Those are our priorities, we will deliver them and the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 will help us get there.

However, what has happened with COVID-19 has made things difficult. It has changed the way in which the government works. Like all businesses large and small, you need to review your business operations to ensure you are targeting your funding at the best value for money, whether that is investing in new technology, changing the way you deliver services or having staff on the ground to make sure you meet the needs of your customers. As I have said, all businesses need to look at their operational expenditure. The private sector has been reviewing the way they operate as a result of COVID, and the Queensland government is doing exactly the same by considering a savings and debt management plan.

The debt management plan looks at achieving \$3 billion in savings over four years and this bill aims to lock in those savings. Several reviews across government have looked at work units, their structures and their operational expenditure. Through that process we will look at where savings can be made. In the 2021 state budget it was announced that savings of \$352 million had already been achieved through a range of measures. In addition to identified savings, a significant amount of work has been done to review the operational expenditure in various work units across the Queensland Public Service to ensure that we are really focused on its core responsibilities. This bill allows for the legislative change that is required to implement those recommendations.

I want to make it extremely clear that this is not about sacking staff or cutting frontline services. The LNP sacked 14,000 public servants, which was totally unforgiveable. They cut services by sacking our doctors and nurses, our police, our teachers and other hardworking public servants. What they did was absolutely appalling. In Central Queensland they sacked 475 people. The LNP sacked 197 people, including 40 nurses and midwives, in the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service. Nine QBuild staff were sacked as part of the first wave of the 322 statewide QBuild jobs lost. To make it worse, that was announced just before Christmas 2012. Everyone was just a number.

I was a public servant during the Newman years. You lived on tenterhooks. You just kept your head down, waiting for a call that your job was gone. I have good friends who were sacked. They were hardworking people. I have friends who have not recovered as a result of having had their employment terminated. There were even suicides. However, it was not only the Public Service they cut funding to; they also cut funding to many of our community organisations. I could not believe they could cut funding to women's shelters, women's health services, the tenancy advisory service, Anglicare and the list goes on. They have no understanding of the support that is required for vulnerable people in our communities.

Out west—in Barcaldine, Longreach and those places—they just sacked staff, and the ongoing impact on those communities was huge. It had a ripple effect through the whole community. It was absolutely appalling. What really scares me is that Campbell Newman is back working for the LNP. The opposition leader was his apprentice. It would be a case of going back to the bad old days if the LNP ever returned to power—back to cutting, sacking and selling.

This bill also amends the Financial Accountability Act 2009, which contains government advertising requirements to be satisfied online or in publication. People in regional Queensland lost their daily newspapers. This has had a huge impact on our elders. I will correct the opposition: they talk about the fact that we will not be doing any advertising in regional papers. We still will be; it is still there. We understand the importance of that, but we need to look at all mediums of communication. The world is changing around us and we have to be on the front foot.

We are looking at reducing red tape. This is extremely important for our small businesses. They need to find those savings. They need to be honing in on what is required to make their businesses successful. I think that is another really good point of this bill.

This bill delivers on the government's ongoing commitment to economic recovery. We need to be creating jobs and future-proofing Queensland to ensure we have the critical infrastructure that we require. As our population grows—and we keep seeing the migration from down south into Queensland as they know how great a state this is—we need to make sure we have the infrastructure and jobs required for that.

This bill is also about making sure that we deliver frontline services and leveraging economic expertise across the government to better develop policies. We need to ensure that every dollar of taxpayers' money delivers the greatest possible benefit for taxpayers. It is so important. People say that the LNP are the better economic managers. They are not. Let's look at what happened when they were last in power. They may have worried about the south-east corner, but they did not care about regional Queensland or the small regional towns.

Mr Tantari: What about the feds? A trillion dollars over.

Mr O'ROURKE: That is a whole other story. They keep cutting jobs out of regional Queensland. It is just appalling. They have no understanding of the importance of having diversity of employment to make sure these communities prosper. I commend the bill to the House.