




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (5.15 pm): I rise in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021 as a measure to defend Queensland against the usual LNP solution of cutting services to the public, sacking family breadwinners and strategising to sell off most of Queensland while innocently calling such plans Strong Choices. ‘Strong for who?’ was the question posed by thousands of mums and dads sacked by the LNP last time around. Conversely, this bill aims to support the state’s contribution to the Queensland Future (Debt Retirement) Fund; introduce a unit model to streamline an annual process of indexing regulatory fees; abolish Building Queensland and the Building Queensland board and integrate Building Queensland staff, assets, resources and records and liabilities into the Department of State Development; change the governance structure of the National Injury Insurance Agency Queensland; repeal the Public Safety Business Agency Act 2014 so that machinery of government changes may reintegrate the Public Safety Business Agency into public safety entities; abolish the Queensland Productivity Commission and integrate its functions into Queensland Treasury and the Queensland Competition Authority; and mandate the legislation which requires or authorises print advertising or publication by government agencies shall be satisfied by digital and electronic advertising or publications subject to appropriate exemptions. Even the impending transfer of registry staff includes safeguards around wages and conditions and ensures they will not be the target of another strong choice. My community on the Sunshine Coast has not forgotten what debt reduction or strong choices means to the LNP.

Mr Molhoek: You weren’t even here when that was around.

Mr HUNT: I will take the member’s interjection. I was, however, in the public sector the last time the opposition was in government and I was neck deep in those changes so thank you very much. We have not forgotten the 39 QBuild staff sacked from the Sunshine Coast directly before Christmas 2012. Merry Christmas from the LNP! We have not forgotten, nor will we ever forget, the 80 hospital and health workers sacked from Caloundra, Maleny, Nambour and Gympie. Indeed, I think of those Sunshine Coast nurses and midwives every time I hear the LNP pretend to care about Queensland Health because apparently nothing improves health faster than sacking nurses.

The Palaszczuk Labor government makes sensible and considered savings in a way that does not hurt everyday Queenslanders. The bill ensures that frontline services are protected and can continue to provide for the needs of the Queensland public. Compare this to the approach offered by the LNP when last they had the chance to show what they could do. It was essentially a case of drawing swords, shouting tally-ho and charging into the public sector, slashing and burning their way through the livelihoods of thousands of Queensland families. This is what the LNP means by saving. They never met a Queenslanders they could not sack and they never met a ‘for sale’ sign they did not instantly fall in love with, but apparently it is all forgiven if you call it a strong choice.

There are sensible savings that can be made under this bill without recourse to the cut, sack and sell mentality. The LNP seem intent on complaining about the Titles Registry going into the Future Fund—and small wonder. It would mean it would be secure in public hands and safe from the strong

choices of the future. It means our communities will get full use of the registry as it provides value on the state's balance sheet. It will provide an offset for debt and destroy the childish narratives around debt and privatisation, allowing the registry to be used as an asset to offset against debt and reduce the net debt of Queensland. Of course, this is alarming for the opposition who will not be able to siphon off millions of dollars of public money to consultants in an attempt to sell state assets. They will have to make another strong choice, as I am sure they plan to do.

Speaking as someone who was a public servant and an employee of Corrective Services during the LNP's last term, I along with many of my mates well remember the contestability managers, the tyre kickers and the fruit squeezers whose job it was to select the ripest and lowest hanging fruit for the privatisation chopping block. We all know what was in store for Borallon Correctional Centre and it would have been called a 'strong choice'. I particularly remember the LNP's answer at the beginning of the crowding issue in Queensland jails: close a jail. Yes, in one of the most bizarre examples of problem solving in the lead up to Strong Choices, the LNP's best remedy to a lack of bed space in jails was to close a jail, and I am not even kidding! Under this government we are building a 1,000-bed jail at Gatton because that is what is required. This government is not crippled by a cut-slash-and-sell mentality. We build things; we do not tear them down.

When it comes to debt and deficit, the myopic approach of the LNP is simply breathtaking. They complain of deficit when their federal counterparts in Canberra have just laid out a plan for decades of the same. They are horrified by debt yet their federal counterparts have just cracked the trillion-dollar debt mark. We all remember the debt truck; now under the federal LNP we will need a debt freight train. While the New South Wales government racks up a higher debt than Queensland by every measure, actual and proportional, our local LNP simultaneously argue against Queensland's much lower debt while complaining that a particular piece of infrastructure needs improving—all without a hint of irony. While it is certainly true that Building Queensland and the Productivity Commission have had a role to play in Queensland, they will certainly be able to function from within our government agencies to strengthen our COVID recovery and contribute to savings measures.

We also remember the ramifications of the LNP's decision to set government fees at 3.5 per cent and then we watched as they rose to almost 11 per cent during their term of government. Under Labor those same government fees are now sitting at 1.7 per cent indexation and fees and charges only index in line with inflation. That is a fairly stark contrast.

As we watch the slow and steady decline of newsprint, not only is it prudent to re-examine government printing practices but also it is a much more efficient way of targeting important government information to where it will do the most good. In this day and age, that medium is most certainly online and in an electronic format. In the same way, where most regional papers do exist there is still the capacity to utilise them for government notices.

The \$3 million in savings provided by this bill is a significant amount of money for most communities and Caloundra is no exception. In Caloundra \$3 million would mean a new school hall for Caloundra State School. \$3 million could refurbish the Golden Beach State School tuckshop 10 times over. \$3 million could put lights at the AFL ground of the mighty Caloundra Panthers and build a clubhouse for the Caloundra Little Athletics. \$3 million would refurbish the amenities block at Caloundra State High School. \$3 million would go most of the way towards installing traffic lights at Ridgewood Road, which was delayed for 17 years by the LNP—but I am sure they were just about to act on it. \$3 million would be more than double the way towards the new extensions of the Beerwah library and community centre. Fortunately, I am part of a government that has pledged to deliver all of those things and more in Caloundra. Let us be very clear: for my community, \$3 million could make a great deal of difference, especially when compared to the stultifying lack of activity over the past century or more.

In closing, there is one last but very telling comparison that needs to be told in this House because the retelling of history is important. In 2012 I was rostered on duty at the Woodford Correctional Centre. The shift started routinely enough, if any shift in a jail can be called routine. However, just after lunch Dominic Fitzgerald, the other union delegate on duty, and I were called to the general manager's office. It seemed that some of our staff were being called down to the office and a union delegate was required in case any of them asked for a support person. All of the staff who were called down asked to have a delegate attend the meeting with them. It was one of the worst days I ever had as a union delegate.

That was the day I saw what 'savings measures' really mean to the LNP. One by one the staff walked in, sat down and were told they no longer had a position within Corrective Services. That morning they were fully employed and productive members of the team at Woodford, sharing the danger and helping to keep our community safe. That afternoon they had to go home and tell their families that they were unemployed. Two of them were single parents. One of them—who just a week before had received a commendation—had to go home and tell her special-needs daughter with the news. I will

never forget their faces as they were handed those white envelopes. Every one of them—male and female, young and old—burst into tears before they had even started to open them, knowing what was inside: families destroyed, jobs in tatters, mortgages in ruins. Mums, dads and their children were all staring down the barrel of an uncertain future. I saw it all play out firsthand, although I wish that I had not. I will never forget it and nor will the rest of Queensland. I commend this bill to the House to ensure that it never happens again.