




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2021

DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.08 pm): I rise in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021, especially its small business initiatives. The Palaszczuk government is delivering our plan for economic recovery. We are keeping our promises to Queenslanders to fund frontline services that keep them safe, create jobs and grow the economy. We are unashamedly focused on all jobs because we know that there is dignity in work. It is because of our economic recovery plan and because we are delivering sensible, prudent savings through this bill that we can continue to roll out programs that are getting Queenslanders into work.

To give members some statistics, since 2018 we have supported over 32,000 young Queenslanders through free TAFE and apprenticeships for under 25s—that was very popular in my local state high schools when I visited to talk about it; we have supported more than 25,000 jobseekers into jobs through Back to Work; we have created over 36,000 jobs through Skilling Queenslanders for Work; and we are partnering with small business owners and managers across our state through the Big Plans for Small Business package, providing financial support, training and expert advice.

Our economic recovery plan, including these prudent savings, means more support for small businesses and small to medium enterprise too, which I have spoken about in this House many times because I have so many of them in my electorate. Our small businesses employ nearly one million Queenslanders—I should know, I used to work for one. Our restaurant employed staff, but it also created hundreds of indirect jobs for our suppliers, many of whom were also small businesses or SMEs that are based in Queensland and employed Queenslanders.

During the last 12 months our government has helped thousands of small businesses stay afloat through COVID-19. We made available more than \$180 million in small business COVID-19 adaptation grants which have been paid to more than 20,000 small businesses. These grants have helped them to pay their bills, diversify and change the way they operate during COVID. Many small businesses in my electorate, such as Silver Dove Funerals in Sumner and the Piggyback Cafe in Jindalee, received money to assist them during COVID to keep their employees on the books, stay viable and come out the other side so that we can build back better. We acknowledge their resilience and we are now focused on helping them to bounce back. Last year it was fantastic to call those businesses and let them know that they had been successful in receiving those grants and, excitingly, many of them used the funds to hire additional local businesses to assist with their transition. During this time Flex PR helped many local businesses in my area weather that storm.

For many businesses the pandemic has been a catalyst for change—that goes for both big and small businesses. It is interesting to note that more than 7,000 Queenslanders started their own business in the 2019 financial year despite the pandemic, which I think speaks to the confidence in our community. It is thanks to the economic management of the Palaszczuk government that Queensland is and continues to be the place to be for small and medium businesses.

Our new grants programs are targeting emerging businesses, including sole traders, established businesses and those that are growing into medium sized businesses. These grants are in many ways the direct result of the Small Business Roadshow that was operated earlier this year when the minister for small business and her department crisscrossed this great state. Despite the fact that Queensland is a large and diverse state with many different needs, I understand that the feedback that was received from these roadshows was fairly consistent right throughout the state. Small businesses right throughout Queensland held fairly similar views about what needed to be done by the government, and the minister for small business has wasted no time in listening and acting.

Contained in this bill is the establishment of the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. We want to continue to make it easier to do business right here in Queensland. This integration of the Queensland Productivity Commission with Queensland Treasury will drive greater economic productivity and economic growth to promote economic recovery. The Queensland Small Business Commissioner has already started working with the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. These offices will pursue further improvements for small business through regulatory reforms and modernising and streamlining the regulatory environment.

We know that when people start a small business it is not necessarily because they have a firm grasp of, or even an interest in, government regulations. It is because they have an idea, they have a passion and they have the get-up-and-go and the motivation to have a crack at getting their big idea off the ground and making something out of it. This Friday I will be visiting a brand new business in my electorate—it just launched this week—the Cub Cave. It is run by a local Jindalee mum, Sarah. It is a completely online business borne from the idea of quality baby products from a local mum of three. Due to COVID Sarah has realised that far from being a drawback, an online-only business could be a real asset. It is a wonderful way to test the market with her great new idea without necessarily investing in lots of stock and overheads and the other things that come with starting up a business.

Our communities right across Queensland are full of wonderful entrepreneurs just like Sarah. This Friday I am certainly looking forward to stocking up on baby gifts for family and friends. Businesses like the Cub Cave will only benefit from our red-tape reduction strategy as our government recognises that business managers and owners working on their business do not want to spend any more time than they have to on regulation. They want to spend it strategising on how they can expand.

We want to help small business grow and thrive. Our small business grants complement this, whether it is the ever popular digital grants, Mentoring for Growth or our COVID-specific grant options that we rolled out last year. During COVID we rolled out free training for small business owners to transition online with short courses on cybersecurity, digital communications and digital literacy and we saw over 24,000 enrolments. We rolled out the biggest changes to payroll tax in over a decade, including a regional discount. We also re-established the Queensland Small Business Commissioner, which was previously abolished by the LNP. We know that this role will give strong support to our small businesses as they navigate this new post-COVID economy. It is the Palaszczuk government that has stood beside small business owners through thick and thin, keeping Queenslanders safe and keeping our economy going and growing.

This red-tape reduction will free up business owners to do other government paperwork, like submitting grant applications for the Ignite Ideas Fund or Made in Queensland. Recently I was lucky enough to tour the premises of a couple of successful proponents in my electorate, including National Plastics & Rubber, who, it may interest the House to know, actually make the chock wedges for large trucks in every mine throughout Queensland. They are an incredibly successful business and were recently successful in getting their first major government grant, as I understand it. We also have IntelliDesign which has been a successful recipient of the Ignite Ideas Fund. I thank Minister Butcher for coming out to tour that company with me last year. It is one of the many small businesses in Mount Ommaney that will benefit from the changes that we are bringing before the House today in the small business space.

Businesses, both small and large, have the opportunity to tender for government works through the QTender process, but also government departments go out and proactively source quotes from small and medium enterprises throughout Queensland. Photogrove, a business in my electorate, has held a Queensland Mines Inspectorate tender that they were proactively approached for over 10 years ago. It is their single biggest contract. This is one example of our Queensland government going out to source quotes, looking for local businesses that it can provide work to. This contract makes a huge difference to Photogrove. They are a business that has been operating for over 50 years. They were not always in Mount Ommaney. They were once based in the city. That is how old they are. They told myself and Milton Dick when we visited that they would not get by without this fantastic contract.

Suffice to say this bill will free up time for small and medium businesses in Queensland to further explore the opportunities that exist to provide quotes for government contracts, and I am looking forward to working with my small businesses so that even more of them can be proud Queensland government suppliers. I commend the bill to the House.