




Speech By  
**Jonty Bush**

**MEMBER FOR COOPER**

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### **DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL**

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (11.54 am): I could not disagree more with the statements from the member for Toowoomba South. I rise to speak in support of the bill, a bill that recommends sensible savings while protecting vital Public Service jobs and assets and ensuring our frontline services are sustainable and are focused on the needs of the public.

Following the years of 2012 to 2015, Queenslanders are now sensitive to the detail in any debt reduction strategy, as they should be, so it is important that they have the answers to the following questions: what will the savings be? Will jobs be lost? Will the quality of our public services be compromised? I will answer those questions now.

Firstly, the bill provides for \$3 million in direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and other ancillary costs. Members opposite have scoffed at \$3 million, but that money reprioritised could build additional classrooms for burgeoning schools or it could support a stimulus package for businesses impacted by COVID. Importantly, the \$3 million in direct savings is only one part of the government's broader \$3 billion savings and debt reduction agenda. This savings agenda achieved \$367 million in savings last year and targets \$750 million this financial year to get to \$3 billion in total over the four years.

Secondly, these savings will be achieved without cutting frontline services, sacking public servants or selling Queensland assets. As part of the government's COVID-19 Fiscal and Economic Review and the implementation of its savings and debt plan, the government announced that it had identified opportunities for the structural reform of statutory bodies and agencies where their functions could be integrated within existing government departments. This bill implements those structural and economic reform priorities by integrating the staff, assets, resources and liabilities, and functions of some identified statutory bodies into existing government departments, finding efficiencies and strengthening the capabilities and services of our Public Service.

Building Queensland will move into State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. This will enhance that department's infrastructure advice and assurance capability. It will also streamline processes, reduce administrative costs and provide more coordinated infrastructure advice and assurance to government.

The productivity and regulatory review functions of the Queensland Productivity Commission will be integrated into Treasury through the establishment of the Office of Productivity and Red Tape Reduction. This integration will enhance Treasury's economic policy capability and enable greater integration of the government's economic strategy, driving greater productivity and economic growth to promote economic recovery.

Additionally, the bill will change the governance structure of the National Injury Insurance Scheme to drive greater efficiencies and provide stronger alignment of the governance of motor accident personal injury schemes.

The bill will also repeal the Public Safety Business Agency Act so that machinery-of-government changes can reintegrate the PSBA into public safety entities. The PSBA was established to provide support services and hold infrastructure fleet and communication technology assets for public safety entities; namely, the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management.

Although the PSBA was established to reduce waste and duplication, it has resulted in more complex business and service delivery arrangements, leading to inefficiencies and greater risks and costs to the PSBA and the agencies it services. The reintegration of the PSBA into public safety entities will promote the ability of these agencies to efficiently deliver services to the community.

Thirdly, not only can we guarantee that the quality of our public services will not be compromised; they will in fact be strengthened through the initiatives in this bill as we redirect savings into both our frontline services and core support roles like research and development in health, and student wellbeing packages in schools.

The Palaszczuk Labor government is investing more in our core and critical services than ever before. Our frontline public servants have gone above and beyond to protect Queensland through what is arguably one of our greatest challenges in modern history. From the contact tracers, COVID ward nursing staff, members of the Queensland Police Service and State Emergency Service volunteers who have worked on the borders to the teachers who delivered lessons remotely, these public servants deserve our unreserved respect and protection. That is why we have continued to strengthen the front line, announcing within the 2020-21 budget an additional 5,800 nurses and midwives, 1,500 doctors, 475 paramedics and 1,700 allied health professionals. We remain committed to delivering over 2,000 extra police personnel by 2025. Our government will always back our frontline workers.

We are committed to ensuring our health system will be even stronger once we are past COVID-19, with a record investment of \$21.8 billion this financial year, including the delivery of seven new, innovative satellite hospitals across South-East Queensland ensuring healthcare services and employment that is closer to home for tens of thousands of Queenslanders. Queensland's workforce participation rate continues to lead the country—a sign of confidence in our economic future. This government remains committed to ensuring that jobs will be there for people.

We are going to hear—and we have heard a bit already this week—from those opposite that the savings do not go far enough. It really is a diversion—a diversion from having us take a trip down memory lane and remembering what the LNP government did to Queenslanders when they were in government. I was in the Public Service at that time—I remember it well—under Campbell Newman and those opposite. As I walk around the electorate and go about my roles and functions, people often approach me to talk about those times. Do members know the four words they use over and over? They say, 'Never let them forget.'

Let us not forget what an LNP government looks like for Queensland. We know that when they were last in government they: sacked 14,000 government workers, despite telling workers they had nothing to fear—including 4,400 health workers' jobs, including 1,800 nurses and midwives; slashed \$288 million in employment programs, including Skilling Queenslanders for Work; axed \$368 million in grants to the department of communities to support our vulnerable Queenslanders in need of assistance; cut \$120 million in funding to community groups from Queensland Health; cut \$60 million from local government grants and subsidies; and shut seven schools.

The sheer volume of these cuts is eye-watering, but it is not just the scale of it that is heartbreaking but where they made the cuts that really tells the story of who those opposite really are. The cuts affected our most vulnerable and those needing help, people who were unwell, people who needed training to get into work and those renting and living in precarious housing who missed out when the tenants advisory service was closed.

The stories that came from that period—stories that even this week people are continuing to share with me—fill me with anger. Stories like that of Anne—not her real name, such is the hesitancy of people to talk about this—who shared with me how she came back to work early from major surgery because she was scared she could not compete for the few jobs left in her team if she were away from the workplace for a few extra days, such was her anxiety. Anne should have been able to take paid medical leave. She should have been able to recover. Instead, she rushed back to work, into an environment that was suddenly very uncertain and stressful. Anne experienced complications from her surgery. Despite this, she continued to attend not one but several interviews in an attempt to secure any job she could in that agency.

There are stories like that of Mel—also not her real name—who still suffers anxiety when she speaks about what she witnessed working within a department at the time. In Mel's words—

It was terrifying, absolutely soul shattering to see my colleagues' names struck off a list. It was literally a spreadsheet of staff and teams and we had to just cross off names to get our staff numbers down.

This is what hasty reductions look like—stricken names on a page. This was the cavalier approach that was supported and encouraged by the LNP in government.

It really was worse than that. I recall going to a barbecue during that time, as a public servant myself, and speaking to a small group about what was going on in the Public Service—the job cuts. I mentioned the fear that people were living with and the uncertainty. I mentioned how people were suffering psychological distress and that families were separating. I mentioned that we had started to hear about suicides. One of the women turned to me and said something that stopped me. She said, 'Good'.

The approach the LNP took in targeting the Public Service in the way they did invoked a blood-lust in some people in society. Public servants who were once proud of their skills and abilities and who were proud of their commitment to the public were suddenly made to feel ashamed of their vocation. Imagine being made to feel ashamed of what one does to earn a living. Imagine a political party that turns society against itself. Imagine invoking a sense of self-hatred amongst an entire cohort of workers because of one's own ideological views. I can only think of one other party that perhaps might do that.

The Palaszczuk Labor government has restored certainty and integrity to the Public Service. Queenslanders have not forgotten that either. I commend the bill to the House.