




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2021

DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (4.00 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill. It is important that we put sensible measures in place to ensure communities are protected from the cutting of services, job losses and the threat of the sell-off of our publicly owned assets while reducing government debt. Labor knows how to make prudent savings in a way that does not hurt Queenslanders. The savings in this bill will ensure our frontline services are sustainable and focused on the needs of the public.

When those opposite were in government my community was doing it particularly tough. There was a downturn in the resources industry. Mackay is a service centre for this industry. There were job losses and on top of that there were jobs that were shed by the LNP government. When the then government should have been supporting my community they sank the boot in with sackings. They cut public sector jobs that could have kept our community bubbling along until the economy turned around. There is dignity in work and as a government we should be doing everything in our power to ensure we provide the opportunities for communities to be able to build their economies and grow jobs, not take them away.

An example of funding slashing by those opposite compared to our approach is the LNP's slashing of RoadTek funding of more than \$98 million. The Mackay Vines Creek bridges were literally crumbling. Their solution was to cut load limits and close one of the two lanes. This may seem reasonable to some, but it left the Port of Mackay, a vital piece of the transport supply chain for exports and imports into our region, in shambles. It hit our sugar industry. Trucks could only be partly full when delivering sugar to the port. This was a huge expense to industry. All of the other commodities faced the same fate. Our fertiliser and fuel trucks could only be partly full to meet the new restrictions on weight limits. A further 10 jobs were slashed at NQBP managed ports under the LNP. The very first Palaszczuk government budget allocated \$28 million to replace the Vines Creek bridges. There is a stark contrast in how we do business.

Over the next four years about \$1.371 billion will be spent on transport and roads in the Mackay Whitsunday district, estimated to support 1,250 local jobs. Some of the key projects that will be delivered or have already been delivered by the Palaszczuk government include: the \$497 million Mackay Ring Road; the \$120 million Mackay Northern Access Upgrade; the \$150 million Walkerston bypass; the \$39 million Bruce Highway safety upgrades between Mackay and Proserpine; \$39 million for the Bruce Highway safety upgrades between Proserpine and Bowen; \$25 million for the Proserpine-Shute Harbour Road duplication and intersection upgrades; \$80 million dollars for the Peak Downs Highway upgrade between Eton and Mackay; and \$377,000 to design a much needed new bus station on Mangrove Road. We are also trialling two bio-ethanol buses in partnership on the urban and school bus networks in Mackay. These buses are expected to be on the network and up and running fully by the middle of this year. There is much more being done. All of these are employment enhancing projects. These projects are engaging as many locals as possible.

We can all remember the great school sell-off. Instead of building schools like the Labor government is doing, under the LNP we faced the sell-off of our schools. I remember, morning after morning, standing outside Stuart State School with parents and students who were begging to keep their school open. The school had over 100 students and was growing, but they had to flog it off. We need to remember that we need to keep our assets in our hands for our local people.

Those opposite make a lot of noise about health. The question the LNP has never answered for Queenslanders is: if they are so invested in health why in government did they sack 4,400 health workers? To deliver services we need to have trained health workers, including nurses and midwives, which those opposite sacked. It is extraordinary to think that during a worldwide shortage of qualified nurses the LNP were sacking them in Queensland.

The Palaszczuk government has invested in health in my region. Then health minister, Cameron Dick, opened the brand new build of the Mackay Base Hospital. The heart catheter lab has been extended to be a 24/7 service, saving local lives and improving the ongoing health of heart patients. We saw the establishment of a dedicated orthopaedics ward with specially trained nurses. Patients are benefitting from dedicated care in these areas of need. Planning for the rebuild of the brand new, modern Sarina hospital is well underway.

Preventative medicine and care is also vital to our communities. It is most beneficial for communities to intervene in the health journey of people to give advice and assistance before a person becomes so ill that they need to be admitted to hospital. That is why it was a great tragedy that the LNP removed \$120 million in funding to community groups from Queensland Health. Delivering quality health care, no matter where people live in Queensland, is a priority for the Queensland government.

The privatisation of our public assets is not a way to protect our future assets. We have seen in other states the pain inflicted on everyday families with the sell-off of electricity assets as an example. They are facing huge hikes in their utility prices. Labor will maintain our assets for the future benefit of our communities.

That is why this bill will see the Titles Registry placed in the Future Fund. This will secure publicly owned assets in the hands of Queenslanders. Queensland's taxpayers will reap the benefit of the generated income by seeing state debt offset. Queenslanders, and in particular my community, have told me that they do not want to see state owned assets being sold—not their ports, not their power assets. They were angry that those opposite wasted \$70 million before the 2015 election on consultant fees to develop their plan for privatisation. My community has said loud and clear: no thanks to privatisation.

The bill provides for \$3 million in direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and ancillary costs. In my community \$3 million could realise three palliative care beds or be a down payment on the Mackay Regional Council's Pioneer Valley mountain bike trail or works on the Mackay PDA waterfront. It could also see seed funding for new industries to diversify manufacturing from the sugarcane crop by-products. All of these projects could grow and build my region.

Families and the average working person need a model for government fees to be set so they are not hit with uncertainty and fees they are unable to pay. Under the LNP we saw fees continue to bounce up an incredible 3.5 per cent. Over three years this would equate to a staggering 11 per cent. The Palaszczuk government is bouncing fees in the opposite direction. We have brought them down to 1.7 per cent—the lowest index rate in a decade. To give the community certainty, charges will only be indexed in line with inflation.

As I said at the start of my contribution, there is dignity in work. That is why I am so pleased that as a government we have increased our government notifications to a mix of online and print for regional papers where they still exist. I want as many of my local companies and employers to be abreast of all opportunities to engage in state government contracts. I support the bill.