




Speech By  
**Kim Richards**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (12.42 pm): I rise in support of the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. This bill is important for Redlanders; it is important for all Queenslanders. They know that when it comes to the incredible challenges that COVID-19 has presented it is our Palaszczuk government that has kept them safe and kept us on track in economic recovery. Our strong health response is seeing us economically bounce back better and faster than any other jurisdiction. We are a government that knows it is important to invest in our health system, to invest in our frontline services, to invest in education, to invest in our small businesses and, importantly, to invest in vital infrastructure.

Reflecting on reducing debt and creating savings, I think we need to look back and consider what historical approaches have looked like, what has worked and what has not worked. We know that sacking 14,000 Queenslanders during the LNP Newman era was something that did not work. It did not work in my area. Across the state 4,400 health workers were sacked. In our Metro South health region that equated to 925 hospital jobs and nearly 300 workers. I could not imagine what COVID would have been like if it had occurred under the Newman reign from 2012 to 2015.

Our economic plan, which is underpinned by this Debt Reduction and Savings Bill, focuses on delivering for Queenslanders. Again, reflecting on my area back in the LNP Newman era, we saw the Wynnum Hospital closed during that time with no consideration given to investing important money back into the Redland Hospital, which we are seeing now has a \$50 million car park and a \$62 million ICU master plan for expansion all underway. It was crazy that they would actually close a hospital that was providing important palliative care services to our community. When we reflect back and consider what we might do to create savings or reduce debt, I do not think we could put a price on what the closure of the Barrett centre did for Queenslanders. It was absolutely shameful. To close down such an important mental health facility in the endeavour of saving money is simply beyond belief.

**A government member:** No words.

**Ms RICHARDS:** There are no words. We heard during the contribution of the members for Keppel and Hervey Bay about the 'box man'. I think a lot of us know the stories of the 'box men' that were around all of the government departments, particularly in Public Works, one of our most important departments in terms of investment in projects. The Newman government absolutely decimated Public Works: the director-general, the assistant deputy director-general, the executive director—they lost an enormous knowledge bank, and there is nothing smart about losing knowledge. Little was delivered in infrastructure during that time.

The business I was in at that time was certainly affected by this really chaotic approach to debt reduction. We had a project in our office that had all three levels of government support; it had federal, state and local government funding. It was the Cairns entertainment precinct. It was a \$155 million project. Millions had been spent to get that project ready for the appointment of the managing contractor. I think we were 48 hours off the managing contractor being signed up to deliver that. There were architectural fees, engineering fees, community consultation fees, town planning fees—and I could go on with the list of what had been invested to get that project to that point.

That project was shelved by the then minister, the now Leader of the Opposition, David Crisafulli. He pulled the pin on the state funding. Everybody in this room knows how important it is to have three levels of government working together to make sure that we can deliver for all Queenslanders. It was so disappointing to see that project shelved, particularly in Cairns, a struggling regional economy. This project was going to invest in that community. The knock-on effect did not go only as far as the investment in that project for that local community. It resulted in contracts being cancelled not only in my firm but in a number of other firms that were involved, which resulted in us having to let go of workers, and nobody ever wants to be in that position. Those opposite talk about being strategic in how they invest in infrastructure, but that was something we did not see back in those days.

The other two really important projects for my area are the Alexandra Hills TAFE and the Redlands research centre. If honourable members talk to Barry from the TAFE he will tell them about the day when the 'box man' came in and rounded up all of the staff. They brought that centre to its knees. They were getting ready to sell that baby off. I can say right now that is exactly what their plan was.

In contrast, our government is investing in that space. We are investing in hydrogen. It is all part of our economic plan for recovery. As I said, this bill underpins that economic recovery, and investing in important facilities like the TAFE and the Redlands research centre is what drives economies and what helps economies flourish. Our alternative approach, as the member for Maiwar said, was very different to that of the Campbell Newman LNP government.

The other important thing that our Palaszczuk government is all about is investing in Queenslanders, investing in services and investing in our people. Skilling Queenslanders for Work is another one of those amazing programs that was cancelled under the LNP government. It beggars belief that you would cancel a project that helps get people into jobs. Its proven track record is incredible. Some \$288 million was slashed. It was just insane. I know from talking to organisations that deliver really important services, particularly in domestic and family violence, that there was no certainty given around funding agreements. They did not know if they would have the doors open from one day to the next. Again, it represents a stark contrast.

Our economic recovery is about supporting Queenslanders, about investing in our young people's future, about supporting TAFE and free apprenticeships, about partnering with businesses, particularly small businesses, and about using the money that we save to invest in programs such as regional jobs committees. They are doing an incredible job with my chamber of commerce to make sure we are positioned to have the best economic future in the Redlands.

Our Palaszczuk government is about doing business better, doing business smarter and making sure that Queenslanders' money is working hard for them. It is taking prudent action. It is pursuing sensible savings that mean we have more money for services and are able to invest more for all Queenslanders.

We took our economic recovery plan to the people of Queensland in October. They resoundingly backed in our economic response, which was totally underpinned by our health response, to ensure that Queensland creates jobs and that we continue to bounce back better than anywhere else in this country—in fact, anywhere else in the world. Ensuring every dollar counts and working together, working more efficiently and more effectively and working smarter is what this bill delivers for all Queenslanders.

I take this opportunity to thank the Treasurer, the Premier and the Deputy Premier for working together. I thank our Chief Health Officer, Jeannette Young. I do not think there is anywhere else you would rather be living in the world at the moment than Queensland under our Labor Palaszczuk government, which is ensuring that we protect Queenslanders and that their future is bright and prosperous as we continue to recover from the impacts of COVID. I commend this bill to the House.