




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

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DEBT REDUCTION AND SAVINGS BILL

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (12.28 pm): I rise to support the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021. I thank the committee, Queensland Treasury and all the stakeholders who contributed to the inquiry into this bill. I support the bill because it is sensible and seeks to protect Queensland from the other mob's ruthless agenda to cut, sack and sell.

At its core, the bill is about removing redundancies such as the PSBA and returning the workforce to the departments in which they belong. When this government was elected, my community was and is still suffering because of the other mob's relentless cuts. Queenslanders and the people of the Sunshine Coast hinterland want the best from their frontline services.

The Palaszczuk Labor government in this bill aims to make sensible, responsible and prudent savings in a way that does not hurt our fellow Queenslanders. The savings that this bill supports will ensure our frontline services are sustainable and are focused on the needs of the public.

It is no wonder the other mob is angry about us abolishing statutory bodies like the PSBA, because one of those bodies was set up so it could do more privatisation. Everybody knows that the PSBA, the Public Safety Business Agency, was set up so that the other mob could sell it off. The other mob are angry that the PSBA is being abolished because they want to sell it if they ever get back to government. Privatisation is in their DNA, and they are just a disgrace.

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (12.51 pm), continuing: Thank you, member for South Brisbane, for your contribution. Just to reiterate, we are talking about the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill 2021, not the flippant title that will be moved by way of amendment.

The member for Morayfield more or less outlined the abolishment of the PSBA and the reintegration of that workforce into the department. In my electorate alone we are seeing new fire appliances being delivered to our RFB units. They are maintained by QFES. The mechanical units will be returning to QFES. We are seeing continual upgrades and staffing at our general hospital. The brand new police station is on schedule to be open by September. No doubt we will be welcoming some more officers and their families into our beautiful region not long after.

Other economic benefits in terms of savings and helping our Public Service come from infrastructure. Social housing in Smith Street, Nambour, will provide 16 units and is also on schedule. This project is essential to some of my community's most disadvantaged. I will not go into the requirements of construction and the placement of social housing, as these issues are too complex for the other mob to comprehend. It is worth noting that the Newman government presided over not one new dwelling built. In my electorate the investment has been most welcome. When I get around to the many new facilities being supported, I am reminded that Queensland and my region has a government that is getting things done.

The other mob hates this government's policies because when the other mob talk about savings we know what they mean. They mean cutting. When the other mob say that these savings are not enough, what they really mean is that they want to see deep, razor sharp cuts just like when they were in government when they cut 14,000 public servants, including 4,000 health workers, which included 1,800 midwives. They cut infrastructure spend to record lows. The other mob cannot be trusted and is not trusted by the people of Queensland. Their agenda has never changed, and they still will not acknowledge or apologise for it.

In my region alone, not only did they not invest but they slashed 80 hospital and health jobs in the Sunshine Coast district. They sacked 39 QBuild workers as part of 322 sacked statewide just before Christmas 2012. I was saddened to hear the testimony of my colleague the member for Caloundra when he described his personal experience and that of his peers. I acknowledge the service of our corrections officers who truly have one of the most difficult and stressful careers. They are precisely the people who deserve to be respected and protected by government. Obviously the workers compensation bill went some way towards doing that recently, as does this bill.

This is good legislation from good government. The Palaszczuk Labor government is getting things done. The last LNP government was a truly heartless government, and the shadow of it still looms large over our great state. The ghost of that cabinet still haunts the opposition benches. Queenslanders will never forget that their mantra is to cut, sack and sell.

The agenda of the other mob is still painfully apparent. They whinge about putting the Titles Registry in the Future Fund because it means they cannot touch it—they cannot sell off the Titles Registry. The Titles Registry will be secured in public ownership and they will not be able to sell it, and they hate that idea. The other mob hates the idea that Queensland taxpayers will get the full value of the Titles Registry on our balance sheet. By getting that asset on our balance sheet, offsetting debt, it completely removes the other mob's tired old argument for privatisation. The other mob will not be able to write a dodgy report or have a commission of inquiry that recommends it be sold, and they will not be able to waste money on privatisation consultants' fees and jobs for mates.

People in my community do not support privatisation of the state's strategic assets. That is why they chose the Palaszczuk Labor government. Privatisation is in the other mob's DNA. We know this is true because when they were in government they sold Queensland Motorways, they tried to sell our electricity assets and ports, and they wasted \$70 million of taxpayers' money on consultants to try to do it. I am sure that the money found its way into the right pockets.

The other mob are still believing and peddling the same mantra—'Cut, sack and sell. That's how we save.' This is the best our community can expect from those opposite. Under a Palaszczuk Labor government we will always keep our assets. The taxpayer will continue to own the value of the Titles Registry as an asset that can be offset against debt, thereby reducing our net debt. The other mob will say anything to justify their agenda to cut, sack and sell.

Mr Molhoek: You're recreating history. You're the asset sellers.

Mr SKELTON: I take that interjection. When they were over here, they were making movie references and such.

The other mob complain about deficit even when the federal government, which is part of their broader mob, has deficits as far as the eye can see—10 years into the future. There is no sign of a surplus. The other mob complain about debt even as the federal government's debt increases beyond a trillion dollars. The other mob bleat about debt even though the New South Wales state government has higher debt than Queensland, including when measured on a proportional basis. They prattle on about debt not because they believe debt is a problem but because they want to use it to justify cutting, sacking and selling.

The bill provides for \$3 million in direct savings which arise from savings in board costs, office accommodation and other ancillary costs. That \$3 million might not sound like much to the other mob, but it means a lot to my community and can make a lot of difference when invested. Spending \$2.4 million, co-funded with the Sunshine Coast council, for an adventure playground in Cooroy, for example, is a great way of re-allocating government funds.

Importantly, the \$3 million in direct savings is only one part of the government's broader \$3 billion savings agenda—sensible savings that do not harm Queensland, unlike the other mob's raging cuts agenda. Some other bodies are being abolished. As a former opposition leader said, in a post-COVID world 'business as usual is not going to cut it'. We know how they cut it and so do the people of Queensland. Building Queensland and the Productivity Commission have served Queensland well, but now it is time for their work to continue inside government agencies to help support our recovery and save money.

The bill provides a fee unit model that will reduce costs for Parliamentary Counsel as they go through the annual fee unit indexation. Queenslanders will remember how the other mob set indexation of fees and charges at 3.5 per cent regardless of inflation, meaning fees and charges rose in real terms. Under the other mob, government fees and charges increased by 3.5 per cent every year. Over three years that is a nearly 11 per cent increase in the cost of interacting with government.

The Palaszczuk Labor government has brought fees and charges down—first to 2.25 per cent, then to 1.8 per cent and now to 1.7 per cent, which is the lowest indexation rate in more than a decade. In contrast, the Palaszczuk Labor government has adopted the position that fees and charges are only indexed in line with inflation.

Governments must move with the times and the reality is that people throughout the community increasingly get their news online. It is not good enough for government to put some notice in a newspaper and hope someone reads it. Notices need to be put where people are—and people are online now. Last year News Corp stopped printing daily newspapers in many regional communities. We welcome other newspapers starting but they are not daily. They are generally weekly and/or monthly.

I am pleased that the bill provides an exemption so that in regional communities—like those of my peer the member for Cook and those opposite—where newspapers still operate, notices can still be made in the newspaper. I acknowledge the *Sunshine Valley Gazette*, the *Hinterland Times* and the *Cooroy Rag* in my electorate. It is interesting that members opposite have not understood that the exemption provides the means for government to use the traditional forms of media like newspapers. How wonderful to hear them supporting independent media outlets. I look forward to working with them on an inquiry into media ownership.

The fact that this government can still find savings whilst at the same time powering the Queensland economy faster than any other state is testimony to the sound advice from Treasury and the hard work of the state government and its various departments. The complete lack of any coherent plan from the other mob on budget matters and the fact that it took 178 days for them to ask a question that relates is testimony to the fact that they have no idea.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr SKELTON: I take that interjection, member for Logan. Well done to whoever it was on the opposition bench who posed that question. I commend the bill to the House.