



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2022


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Education, Employment and Training Committee, Report

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (4.09 pm): \$2 million for two tradies. Let that sink in. It is no wonder many of our public services are failing, when taxpayers' money is being wasted instead of funding what is really needed here in Queensland. During estimates it was revealed that the Tradies in Paradise scheme has been an abject failure. What was even more concerning were the dismissive answers provided by the Minister for Employment and Small Business when she was questioned about this failed program. According to the minister, wasting \$2 million to attract two tradies to Queensland is a good use of public money because it promoted Queensland to residents in other states. Never mind that the purpose was to attract tradies to ease the burden on those Queenslanders whose homes were inundated as a result of recent flooding and that it only delivered two tradies.

The government has failed to outline any measures that will be used to assess the success or otherwise of that program. This Labor state government is all about the photo-op but forgets about the follow-up. The fact is that \$1,750 was never going to be enough to entice qualified tradespeople to uproot their whole life and move to a new state—\$1,750 would barely cover the cost of petrol, let alone moving costs and accommodation. The almost \$2 million spent on glossy pamphlets and websites promoting the state government could have been used to help flood affected small businesses recover or even to rebuild a number of damaged homes. Spending \$2 million on two tradies is a wasteful use of taxpayer funds and it certainly does not pass the pub test.

If Queenslanders needed any further reasons this tired third-term Palaszczuk Labor government does not deserve their support in 2024, then Labor's reckless indifference wasting hard-earned taxpayer dollars on harebrained ideas like spending \$2 million on two tradies or \$220 million on a redundant camp at 'Wastecamp' should seal the deal. Labor do not care about everyday Queenslanders. Instead, through their actions and failure to plan, this Labor state government show that they are only interested in how things look and not how they are.

The failed Tradies in Paradise scheme was implemented to fill a hole in the skilled worker shortage gripping Queensland. This skilled worker shortage is more than just the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; it is seven years in the making, from when this Labor government first came to power. The state government last year had a target of 11,500 apprenticeship completions but delivered only 10,300. In fact they have failed to meet their target for the last seven years straight, and that equates to a whopping 14,400 apprenticeship completions. That means that right now Queensland

should have 14,400 more qualified tradies than we do. It is no wonder that we are experiencing a skilled worker shortage and that the best this state government can offer to solve the problem are ridiculous thought bubbles like spending \$2 million to attract two tradies.

The waste continues. As the Auditor-General revealed in his report, the state government will write-off about \$4 million of fraudulent claims made by businesses seeking COVID-19 support funding. Around 400 businesses received both payroll tax relief and COVID adaptation grants but most if not all were not eligible for both. When questioned about this obvious and costly error, it was revealed that the state government would not be pursuing any measures to recover the \$4 million lost from double dipping.

It is a tough pill to swallow for the thousands of Queensland small business owners who did not receive a cent of COVID adaptation grant funding, with many of them being eligible but not making the cut. The fact that the state government are not investigating this waste of millions of dollars shows they simply do not care. Well, Queensland small businesses care, especially the ones that closed or barely hung on through those tough times when the borders were shut and local lockdowns were always a possibility. I could go on with examples of waste but I have limited time.

What this year's budget estimates did reveal is a Minister for Employment and Small Business who is out of her depth. Every single portfolio that the member for Bulimba touches ends up a mess. Last term as the minister for youth justice she presided over a regime that put 10-year-old kids in adult watch houses. Who can forget her underwhelming performance on *Four Corners* when questioned about that issue? Now as the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development she is presiding over issues with every single small business grant round she has announced, including the Business Basics Grant which she managed to muck up twice in two weeks. We had \$2 million for two tradies and COVID restrictions that ignored small businesses. Queensland's small businesses deserve better.

(Time expired)