




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

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 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (11.43 am): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2021 and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) 2021. The Appropriation Bill (No. 2) seeks parliamentary approval for supplementary appropriation for unforeseen expenditure of just under \$447.5 million in the 2020-21 financial year. The Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) seeks parliamentary approval of supplementary appropriation for unforeseen expenditure of \$1.795 million incurred by the Legislative Assembly and the Parliamentary Service in 2020-21. This expenditure was largely incurred due to the costs of running the 2020 state election during the pandemic.

We have heard from many members on this side of the House that the Palaszczuk government's strong COVID-19 response over the past two years has resulted in a strong economic recovery for Queensland. Those opposite do not like hearing it, but the evidence is clear. For the last two years we have kept people safe, avoided prolonged lockdowns and got over 90 per cent of our population fully vaccinated. Our staged and measured reopening of our border allowed Queenslanders enough time to get double vaccinated to protect themselves and their families, and it ensured our population avoided the Delta wave which locked down the southern states for months. This is another fact those opposite do not like facing. We all know what would have happened if they had had their way at the outset—constantly calling for the borders to be opened. How many times? It was 64 times.

While Queensland was a stand-out in our response to COVID, it was the nation's premiers who were leading the response, particularly in the crucial early months of the pandemic. In fact, it would be true to say that many Australian lives have been saved, despite our spineless and hoseless Prime Minister.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Ipswich, you have used language that has been deemed to be unparliamentary in the past. I would ask you to withdraw and refrain from similar usage of it in the future.

Ms HOWARD: I withdraw. When Omicron hit here in Queensland we had preparation and good management on our side. We predicted a catastrophic case load of 5,000 patients admitted to hospital at the peak of Omicron, including 500 ICU patients. Instead, we saw a more manageable case load of 925 hospitalisations at the peak and 71 ICU admissions. While Omicron has hit some businesses hard—and I know how tough some are doing it at the moment in my electorate of Ipswich—Queensland's strong economy before the Omicron wave hit has put us in a much better position now to recover faster and to rebuild business confidence sooner. Our Mid-Year Fiscal and Economic Review late last year showed the enviable position Queensland is in, leading the rest of Australia on all economic data.

We have had the highest jobs growth rate out of any state or territory since March 2020, with just over 124,000 more Queenslanders in jobs today than pre-COVID levels. Queensland's unemployment rate has now dropped to 4.4 per cent—the lowest rate since December 2008. Employment growth in Queensland is also forecast to be up 4½ per cent in 2021-22, which is our strongest jobs growth in 15 years.

Queensland's strong economic position is the reason we are attracting more interstate migrants than any other state or territory in Australia. Dwelling commencements are up 40 per cent on before COVID, household lending grew 91 per cent in the last year and dwelling approvals increased by 25 per cent on pre-COVID levels. One only has to see this boom in dwelling construction in the suburb of Ripley in my electorate of Ipswich which is seeing some of the fastest rates of population growth year after year. In the last quarter of 2021, 118 new dwellings were built in Ripley and 363 new residents moved into the suburb. I thank the education minister and Premier for their great announcement this morning of another new school planned to be built in Ripley next year.

Our midyear review last year showed that Queensland's economy recovered faster than the national average. While Australia's economy grew by only 3.9 per cent in 2021, Queensland's economy grew by 6.1 per cent. Queensland is seeing a boom in private investment, dwelling investment and business investment with growth rates for each of these over four per cent while the national average growth rates for each of these indicators is less than one per cent.

People have confidence to spend more with household consumption growing by 2.9 per cent in the last quarter which is 1½ times faster than the rest of Australia. Retail sales are up 17 per cent on pre-COVID levels—higher than the national average. Underpinning this success has been our COVID-19 economic recovery plan which has focused on: safeguarding Queenslanders' health; creating jobs; and working together to support businesses, families and communities across Queensland.

Our COVID-19 economic recovery plan is delivering \$14.2 billion in recovery initiatives to boost Queensland's economy and keep Queenslanders in jobs. In the Ipswich local government area, we have welcomed significant investment, supported by the Palaszczuk government, from manufacturing companies like LAVO in Springfield—and my colleague the member for Jordan spoke about this in her contribution—which is going to manufacture hydrogen fuel cells, and, of course, Rheinmetall's Military Vehicle Centre of Excellence in Redbank in the member for Bundamba's electorate which is employing hundreds of skilled workers locally.

Extending the Works for Queensland program to South-East Queensland councils during COVID not only provided our area with jobs but also provided a necessary shot in the arm to our local economy. This, along with our world-leading health response to COVID-19, has meant that Queensland is now leading Australia's economic recovery.

The appropriation bills reflect the Palaszczuk government's robust economic management. The unforeseen expenditure which was incurred by six departments for the 2020-21 financial year represents only 0.74 per cent of the budgeted appropriation. This is less than half the amount of unforeseen expenditure incurred in the 2019-20 financial year when we saw COVID first hit and less than that incurred under the LNP which saw a peak of unforeseen expenditure of 0.94 per cent of appropriations in 2013-14.

Queensland's government departments are continuously improving their scrutiny and monitoring of expenditure. However, they can still incur unforeseen expenditure for a number of reasons including natural disasters, new government decisions and policies, a change in timing to Commonwealth payments, or accelerated project delivery. The majority of unforeseen expenditure in 2020-21 arose for a number of reasons. For instance, the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services contributed just over \$91 million in unforeseen expenditure primarily due to COVID-19 responses including quarantine accommodation—another result of neglect by the Morrison government—logistics and border control activities.

No-one can deny that these were necessary expenses. They were necessary because they kept Queenslanders safe. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Treasurer, the Premier and the leadership team for the excellent work that they have undertaken in the last couple of years to get us to the point that we are at now. Queensland would be a very different place if they were not in charge, and I thank them. I commend the bills to the House.