



Speech By
Jennifer Howard


MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 3)

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3)

BETTING TAX AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (6.19 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 3) 2022 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2022. The appropriation bill seeks parliamentary approval for supplementary appropriation for unforeseen expenditure incurred during the 2021-22 financial year of just under \$2.9 billion. This is comprised of \$2.2 million for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service and \$2.8 billion incurred by 14 other departments. Unforeseen expenditure is a routine part of the budget cycle and is not the same as departmental overspending. 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.

As we all know, Queensland has faced a number of unprecedented challenges over the financial year 2021-22. Not only was Queensland impacted by several waves of COVID since the end of last year but also we have also faced major flood and rain events which left some communities, including my own, devastated, with hundreds of people left homeless or needing to do major repair works to their homes or community infrastructure. These events were somewhat difficult to fully anticipate and they dented our budget bottom line.

Much of the unforeseen expenditure in the appropriation bill relates to COVID business grants. When the nation was experiencing major COVID waves after we just opened up the state and the country, there was a need to provide additional support to our small businesses and tourism operators. The COVID business grants resulted in a significant amount of spending which was not anticipated at the time of the 2021-22 budget. They certainly helped local businesses in my electorate. In fact, it was the difference between many of them surviving and not surviving.

Despite the setbacks and unforeseen challenges over the last year and a half, Queensland's economy has grown at a rapid rate. On a number of key indicators we are outperforming every other state and territory in the country. In August Queensland recorded its lowest ever unemployment rate since records began in 1978—3.2 per cent. The unemployment rate is still sitting below four per cent.

Queensland is leading the nation in job creation, with almost 215,000 more Queenslanders in work than there were in March 2020. Pleasingly, 83 per cent of those jobs are full-time. Not only has Queensland's economy grown from strength to strength but also we have also outrun other states and territories on population growth. Whether or not this growth is considered a good or bad thing—it depends on who you are talking to—there is no denying the fact that Australians from around the country have recognised that Queensland is the best state to live in. Maybe, just maybe, it has something to do

with the very sound decisions made by our Premier and cabinet during COVID. Over the five-year period to 2021, Queensland's population recorded the largest net gain in the country with more than 107,000 people moving here from different states or territories. Interestingly, New South Wales saw a net loss of around 102,000 people in that same period.

The investment we have seen from the Palaszczuk government in my electorate of Ipswich is unprecedented: \$710 million in this budget for stage 2 of the Ipswich Hospital expansion, delivering 200 beds by 2027. This is in addition to the \$40 million satellite hospital in Ripley which is well and truly underway. The brand new \$91 million Ipswich Hospital acute mental health unit is close to completion.

The 2021-22 budget has allocated \$4.4 million out of a total spend of \$7.4 million to continue building the new Ripley ambulance station. We are building a new \$25 million police station in Ripley, and next year the brand new \$60 million Ripley Central State School will open. We are spending a billion dollars across the Ipswich region on vital infrastructure and capital works that will enhance productivity and support around 3,200 jobs.

As I have already said, Ipswich LGA is the fastest growing in Queensland. We saw that in the latest Census data. Much of that growth is occurring in the Ripley PDA. We have committed \$45 million to that area to develop infrastructure, including \$9.2 million catalyst infrastructure to support delivery of land supply for housing.

Some \$4.2 million out of a total \$10 million will be invested to design and develop an improved fiveways intersection at East Ipswich, in accordance with the local community needs. We have also been the very happy recipients of record funding for schools in our area, especially my much loved local special schools.

The major flood events we saw earlier this year in Queensland had huge impacts on departmental expenditure. This government has brought forward hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in the much needed Bruce Highway upgrades, the Gympie Bypass and the Townsville Ring Road, because these projects are vital and cannot be delayed any longer. We make no apologies for that. The opposition can complain about this spending—in fact, its members like to brag about cutting infrastructure spending—but this is what good governments do. They support the economy, they plan and invest in essential infrastructure, and they support Queenslanders through tough times.

I now want to touch on the Betting Tax and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. At the last election we made a promise to the people of Queensland that there would be no new or increased taxes on Queensland families, and we have kept that promise. The betting tax is not a tax on punters; it is a tax on the multinational betting agencies, many of which are foreign owned such as the Entain Group that owns Ladbrokes and the Flutter Group which owns Betfair. These two companies recorded a combined \$4.5 billion in revenue last year.

The Palaszczuk government is not one to shy away from taxing big businesses that make windfall billion dollar profits each year. In our last budget we delivered a new progressive royalty regime on large multinational coalminers to reflect the increased price of coal, and we implemented the mental health tax levy on large employers. These taxes flow back into Queensland, with the benefits going to Queenslanders. They help us to continue delivering vital public services and infrastructure across the state which are essential to our quality of life.

This bill will see a five per cent betting tax levy imposed on large betting and wagering companies, which will increase their betting tax rate from 15 per cent to 20 per cent. This is the highest betting tax rate in the country, equal to the Australian Capital Territory. It is also worth pointing out that the betting tax bill includes an amendment to the mental health levy—another tax that also impacts big businesses. This amendment will facilitate the implementation of the mental health levy by further developing the administrative, machinery and transitional arrangements relating to the levy.

The mental health levy will be introduced on 1 January 2023 to employers that record annual Australian taxable wages of over \$10 million. This levy will generate \$425 million a year to fund future mental health care and alcohol and other drug services. Right across Queensland, we are seeing increased demand for mental health services. There are many reasons for this but, undoubtedly, COVID and natural disasters have played a significant role. Over the year 2020-21, around 132,000 Queenslanders accessed mental health and alcohol and other drug services through our state's hospital and health services. For many people experiencing a mental health episode, their first port of call is the emergency department of their local hospital. Emergency departments are seeing more people present each year with acute mental health problems.

Thirteen per cent of emergencies responded to each year by the Queensland Ambulance Service are for a mental health crisis, and calls to triple-0 from people experiencing mental health crises are the second most frequent triple-0 calls after falls. It is essential that we provide ongoing and effective public mental health funding so that vulnerable people can access services when they need it most. I am

pleased to note that the new mental health levy will only affect the top one per cent of Queensland businesses such as Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, Coles, Wesfarmers, Telstra and Woolworths. All of these businesses posted net profits in the billions last financial year. In fact, just this week NAB posted a profit of \$7.1 billion. In a world where there are increasing calls for major corporations to pay their fair share of tax, our government is heeding the call.

I reiterate my admiration and respect for the Premier and the government for the way they have handled the pandemic and the extreme challenges that came our way, particularly over the past two years. It has made a huge difference to people in my electorate and, I know, to people right across the state. I am really proud to be a part of a government that has such a focus on the needs of Queenslanders rather than on scoring cheap political points. I commend this bill to the House.