



Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

Mrs GERBER (Currumbin—LNP) (11.33 am): The LNP is undoubtedly the party for good governance, strong economic management and support for small and family businesses. The bills before the House today speak volumes about the Labor government's approach to financial management. The bills provide for approval of almost \$450 million of taxpayers' money to various departments for unforeseen expenditure that occurred last financial year. That is expenditure that was not accounted for by the government in the last budget. The LNP will not be opposing the bills. The money has already been spent by the Labor government, but there are several concerning trends to which I wish to draw this parliament's attention.

First and foremost, Queensland's economy is suffering under this government's poor priorities, underwhelming investment in infrastructure and lack of support for small and family businesses. Queenslanders need strong economic management. This is paramount to the efficient functioning of every government and every service that a government is meant to provide. It is foundational to the delivery of tangible outcomes for communities. No amount of budget trickery or shifting of public funds around paper will hide the objective failure of the Queensland Labor government to spend public money wisely. The latest CommSec State of the States report has Queensland ranked fifth of eight jurisdictions overall for economic performance. Queensland has the worst state score for economic growth, the worst state score for equipment investment and the worst state score for unemployment. Business confidence has plummeted by 16.9 per cent while Queensland's debt has skyrocketed under Labor, on track to reach \$130 billion over the forwards.

Time and again we hear from those opposite that it is because of COVID, a favourite scapegoat of this Queensland Labor government. Never mind the fact that Queensland's debt had already increased under Labor from \$72 billion to \$102 billion pre-COVID. Never mind the fact that two-thirds of Queensland's new debt is being used to keep the lights on, paying for everyday operational expenses rather than lasting infrastructure for Queenslanders. Never mind the fact that Queensland lost its AAA credit rating under consecutive Labor governments. The Bligh-Dick government nor the Palaszczuk-Dick government with its Treasurer at the helm has been able to get it back. None of this can be blamed on COVID; all of this falls squarely at the feet of a Labor government which cannot be trusted with taxpayers' money.

While spending hard-earned public money and racking up an eye-watering debt, this Labor government has also introduced 10 new taxes at a cost of more than \$4 billion to Queensland families. This is despite repeated promises to Queenslanders that no new or increased taxes would be introduced this term. The introduction of the renters tax is yet another broken Labor promise. In addition to broken Labor promises from Queensland Labor, there is also a complete lack of transparency around

the estimates process. I commend the LNP's policy announcement of a parliamentary budget office to restore transparency to the budget process. I encourage those opposite to reflect on this commitment to transparency and openness in government.

Sadly, the lack of transparency from this Queensland government regarding expenditure is hardly surprising. This is a government that has given up on integrity, given up on governing for Queenslanders, and none more so than the Treasurer. In the words of my colleague the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Toowoomba South, this is a Treasurer who is woefully out of touch with the lived experiences of everyday Queenslanders.

Mr Powell interjected.

Mrs GERBER: I take the interjection. This was demonstrated most recently by his appalling lack of empathy for those suffering through the current rental crisis. When asked by a journalist if he felt at least a little bit bad for the people doing it tough with the housing affordability conditions, the Treasurer replied, 'No, not at all.' This is the man in charge of the Queensland government's purse strings. Queenslanders deserve so much better. Given the budget blowouts we are debating today, one would think that some of these funds might have been spent supporting the backbone of the Queensland economy during the latest Omicron wave, our small and family businesses. Unfortunately, the Queensland government has not released any business support packages through the Omicron wave for our small and family businesses. This is despite quarterly reporting showing that business confidence is down 16.9 per cent, sales and revenue are down, profitability is down, employment is down and capital expenditure is down. Worryingly, 63 per cent of businesses have reported being impacted by mental health challenges.

Even after surviving two years of COVID our small and family businesses have struggled to get their customers back, with consumer confidence shaken and early 2022 sales dropping to rates worse than during the peak of COVID. The LNP was quick to support our business community, calling for the state government to urgently assist small business owners and their staff. We saw our neighbours over the border supporting their businesses during the Omicron wave with payment schemes for businesses, rent relief and grants. Queensland small businesses hoped for the same, hoped that this Queensland government would spring into action and support them. The LNP provided a variety of suggestions for ways the Queensland government could provide support including: sick leave pay, removing state government fees and charges for small businesses, and reducing payroll tax. None were taken up.

When this government is consumed by itself, they are not governing for the people of Queensland. They are not listening to the people of Queensland. This lack of proper support from the Labor government does not just affect the business sector. We are seeing the state government fail in the health sector too, particularly around mental health services in Queensland. Does any of the unforeseen expenditure we are looking at today include money for delivering better health services or mental health services? Nope! Too many Queenslanders are missing out on the support they need, falling through the cracks, because they must wait months for an appointment in a system that is at breaking point.

I truly believe the mental health issues facing our community, affecting every facet of our community, is the hidden pandemic. Presentations to emergency departments are reaching unprecedented levels. In comparison to mental health funding interstate, the Queensland government has failed to fund our mental health system adequately. It is not coping, just like the health system more broadly. It is high time the Queensland government stopped blaming everyone else for their problems and focused on fixing this crisis. Queenslanders just want to make sure their loved ones can access critical health services, treatment and support when they need it.

Government members interjected.

Mrs GERBER: I can hear the interjections from the other side. They think it is funny that the mental health system is not funded properly.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Member for Currumbin, resume your seat for a moment please. Member for Hervey Bay, member for Nicklin and member for Everton, stop your quarrelling across the chamber.

Mrs GERBER: That brings me to another health issue that is very close to my heart—the lack of funding in this bill for spinal muscular atrophy testing in Queensland's newborn bloodspot screening program. I have spoken on this subject many times, but SMA testing for newborns is still not a reality in Queensland, despite the fact that the test would only cost around \$10 and despite the fact that in 2019

and again in 2021 the Australian Medical Association of Queensland estimated that the state government would only have to budget \$700,000 to make it a reality. That is all. The Queensland government has overspent almost \$450 million but could not find \$700,000 to save the lives of Queensland kids diagnosed with SMA each year. It makes me so sad to think the Queensland government continues to fail our children diagnosed with SMA each year by not implementing this test in our newborn screening program.

Lastly, I want to address the part of the bill regarding the unforeseen expenditure for the Queensland Police Service. There was nearly \$10 million in additional police expenditure to support the government's border policies. This is just the financial cost. The human cost of the border blockade will never be forgotten by my community. Locals lost their jobs and their livelihoods as a result of this Labor government's policy decisions. Some were left homeless and others were forced to go onto social housing wait lists. Families were separated with two hours notice when the Premier slammed the border closed. People were denied the ability to be by their loved one's side in their final hours—cruelly robbed of precious moments with loved ones.

The Premier got a glimpse of the devastating effect of this on my community when she held a press conference this month in Kirra with local Piers Booth telling the Premier about his dying father—

I did all the right things and your government locked me out of my home state. He was dying and you failed me. Your government failed me when he was dying and I will never, ever forget.

So, yes, this bill talks about poor government priorities, but do not let the government brush the human cost of its poor priorities under the rug.

(Time expired)