




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (10.02 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2023-24 state budget. This Palaszczuk Labor budget fails to deliver for Queenslanders on the long-term cost-of-living relief, the youth crime crisis, the health crisis and the housing crisis. This budget proves that Queenslanders cannot trust the Palaszczuk Labor government to fix the chaos and crisis impacting their everyday lives. Queenslanders cannot trust this government because the Treasurer promised 26 times before the last election there would be no new or increased taxes. There have been five new taxes since that election. Revenue has never been higher but services have never been worse. The Palaszczuk Labor government does not deliver on its promises for Queenslanders. This is what the *Financial Review* published about this budget—

The Palaszczuk Labor government cannot be trusted to deliver on any of their promises that matter to Queenslanders ... Queenslanders have never been in more debt, Queenslanders have never paid more tax and Queenslanders have never seen project overruns of the magnitude that we see today, and yet they have less and less to show for it.

I commend opposition leader David Crisafulli and shadow Treasurer David Janetzki on their budget reply speeches. They have exposed the budget overruns and the lack of delivery by this government and have pointed to positive policies from the LNP. They have pointed out how, despite rivers of gold, the state is gripped by a crisis of crime, a crisis of health, a crisis of housing and the lack of service delivery. This government has not addressed the fundamental pressures on the cost of living like driving down the cost of electricity. In particular, the government's failure to maintain its power plants has contributed to the increases in electricity prices hurting Queenslanders now. This Labor government has not dealt with the big underlying problem at the Callide Power Station.

The Treasurer mentioned that the ratio of net debt to revenue is expected to increase to 55 per cent by 2026-27. In 2020 the state government commenced a debt reduction and savings plan to deal with debt. Well, it is not going so well. We now see the total state debt heading towards \$147 billion by the end of the forward estimates. That equals \$25,500 of debt per Queenslanders by the end of the forward estimates—an increase of 62 per cent since Labor were elected in 2015. That reduction plan is not going so well.

Local governments are disappointed by this Labor budget. In fact, local government did not even get a mention in the Treasurer's speech. The Treasurer dislikes local government so much he could not even bring himself to mention Queensland's councils—the third tier of government in this state, but not one mention in the Treasurer's speech. Councils have once again been forgotten by this Labor government. In fact, the LGAQ wrote that councils have been royally shafted. Despite repeated calls for increased funding for Works for Queensland to protect regional jobs, the government refused to listen. The sacred cow of Works for Queensland has been cut back—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Bush): Pause the clock. Members, I will ask that we drop the volume so that we can hear the member on her feet speak. I will start warning people this evening if it continues.

**Ms LEAHY:** Despite repeated calls for increased Works for Queensland funding to protect regional jobs, the government refused to listen. The sacred cow of Works for Queensland has been cut back to \$42 million to be divided amongst 65 councils. Councils will not be able to support the 21,000 jobs given this funding cut. This cut is at a time when the Auditor-General is saying that 45 councils, approximately 60 per cent of the sector, are either at a moderate or high risk of being financially unsustainable. If only the Labor government had not wasted that \$230 million on a quarantine camp at Wellcamp, it would have the funds to put towards the Works for Queensland program. The cost of the white elephant at Wellcamp would have more than topped up the Works for Queensland program.

Betterment funding for Queensland local governments has slowed under Labor for the past eight years. The average annual funding has been cut by 75 per cent—from \$80 million per year under the LNP to barely \$20 million a year under Labor. At the same time, Queenslanders have borne the brunt of disasters, roads that are closed for longer, bridges that are not raised, seawalls that are further eroded and water and sewerage supplies that are impacted during and after disasters. When investment is not done in betterment, the cost of living increases, insurance costs rise and consumers have to pay the price or go without. This is just another example of the service delivery failure of the Labor government driving up the cost of living on Queenslanders.

Another important funding program for the safety of all those who drive on our state's roads and for local government is the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme. I note that \$76 million has been allocated towards TIDS for local governments in this budget; however, in real terms this program is struggling to keep pace with the escalating construction costs. Building roads is expensive and \$76 million this year does not buy as much bitumen as it did in 2015.

Another problem is that the Labor government is using the TIDS funding to fund their state controlled roads because of their more than \$5 billion road maintenance backlog, rather than enabling councils to use the TIDS money on council roads. When there are rivers of gold in revenue coming into this government's coffers, Labor dip into local government funding streams and spend that funding on state roads, rather than finding funding in their own sources.

It is not only the state Labor government who are not meeting the expectations of Queensland's local governments. The Labor Albanese government fell short in the federal budget. In Labor's federal budget, financial assistance grants reduced again to councils from 0.52 per cent to 0.5 per cent of national taxation. Twenty years ago the financial assistance grants were one per cent of national taxation. Queensland councils want the FA grants returned to one per cent of national taxation. Local governments in Queensland are being squeezed by federal Labor and then squeezed again by state Labor. Labor just do not care about local government

**Mr Lister:** Why does Labor hate local government?

**Ms LEAHY:** I take that interjection. They just hate local government. I do not know why that is.

**Mrs Gerber** interjected.

**Ms LEAHY:** It was not once mentioned in the Treasurer's speech.

I do welcome the government's recent announcement regarding the Bundaberg flood levee. What we do not welcome is the 120 per cent cost blowout exposed in this year's budget. In 2020, the Palaszczuk Labor government committed \$40 million for 50 per cent of the levee. That is a total project cost of \$80 million. In this year's budget, we now learn that the project will cost \$175 million—a 120 per cent blowout.

The residents of Bundaberg have been let down again by the chaos and crisis in the Palaszczuk Labor government. Whilst the LNP support the levee, we need to see the government's plan for North Bundaberg. We need to see the evacuation plan, as well as the option for buyback, home raising and retrofitting. If it is good enough for the people of South-East Queensland to have this type of scheme, it is good enough for the people of North Bundaberg.

There are thousands of not-for-profit community volunteer and sporting organisations across Queensland. Many of these have a hall, a clubhouse or a shed with an electricity connection. Some have already seen their electricity bills double due to the tariffs becoming obsolete. These volunteer groups will not be immune from the rising costs of electricity brought about by this Palaszczuk Labor government. These venues and facilities provide social interaction and meeting places for volunteers who contribute so much to our communities. These volunteers contribute more than \$84 billion in replacement labour costs and gross state product in Queensland, yet they will pay the increasing electricity costs brought about by this Palaszczuk Labor government.

I want to talk about roads in my electorate because they are particularly important for the transport of agricultural produce to market and the return of goods to the region's residents and also for tourism and the tourism industry. It is disappointing that there are no new significant projects in QTRIP. It is disappointing that in Queensland the government does not care about road users because, if you are on an outback road, you are five times more likely to die in an accident than what you would if you were on a metropolitan road.

**Mr Lister:** Disgraceful.

**Ms LEAHY:** It is disgraceful. If the government cared about the deaths on their roads, they would make a significant investment and they would have significant new projects in QTRIP.

**Mr Lister:** And they wouldn't close driver revivers.

**Ms LEAHY:** I take that interjection: they would not close driver revivers. If the government cared, they would fix the roads which are worse now than when they came to office. Roads like the Roma Condamine Road are narrower than the bike tracks in Brisbane, yet the oversize, overmass vehicles that cannot travel on the Dogwood Creek Bridge at Miles are diverted onto this crumbling road. I am fearful that we will have a fatality on that road.

Then there is the Mitchell St George Road south of Mitchell. It has a high traffic volume of tourists and road trains, and bitumen again that is narrower than a bike track. There are plenty more of these roads in disrepair. Tonight I do not have enough time to go through them and talk about all of them. It is disappointing that there is a \$5.7 billion road maintenance backlog in Queensland and we have heard not a plan from this government to address this backlog through this budget.

I note that the government after 12 years have moved to increase the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. The last increase in this scheme was by the former health minister Lawrence Springborg under an LNP government. With the lack of doctors in regional Queensland, Queenslanders will need every bit of this subsidy scheme. Sadly, this Labor government is more interested in spin doctors in the Premier's department than doctors in regional hospitals. If only they worked as hard to find full-time medical doctors for the communities of Augathella, Cunnamulla, Dirranbandi, Injune, Mitchell, Mungindi, Quilpie and Surat as they do to find spin doctors for the Premier's department. Some of these communities have been up to three months with no doctor presence at their local hospital.

The lack of doctor coverage has placed enormous pressure on frontline nursing staff and enormous pressure on emergency retrieval services such as the RFDS and LifeFlight. People have died prematurely because they could not get admitted to a hospital when there is no doctor present. The medical services are suffering under this Labor government because it fails to properly resource the hospital and health services. Under this government these communities' medical services have deteriorated and in this budget there is no plan to restore those full-time medical services.

I want to talk of Peter from Mitchell who was in a car accident on a Friday night. He needed X-rays. Despite his doctor requesting this on the weekend from the Roma Hospital, his family were told that it would cost \$5,000 to call the people in, so he can just wait till Monday. This is not the first time that people with broken bones have been told, 'You are going to have to wait till Monday for your X-rays.' When Peter was finally X-rayed at the Roma Hospital, he was found to have a broken sternum and broken ribs. So, when the health minister said this morning that every patient who needs care gets care, that is not true. This Labor government only deliver care on weekdays and, when it comes to X-rays on the weekends, they just do not happen. Roma is a major regional hospital and they should be able to provide care and X-rays 24/7. However, this Labor government does not deliver those services.

This Palaszczuk Labor budget fails to deliver for Queenslanders on long-term cost-of-living relief; the youth crime crisis, which is gripping not only the community of Goondiwindi but also my communities in Roma and Dalby; and the health crisis. We are hearing, for instance, that people cannot get into the Dalby Hospital because it is full. They simply cannot get admitted. Then we have the housing crisis. I do welcome the announcement of more police for Dalby, but we cannot get those police because we do not have any houses for them to live in. We cannot house those extra police in Dalby. It is proving very difficult to get those extra police into that community. Unfortunately, this Palaszczuk Labor government fails to deliver vital services to regional communities.