




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2015

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (11.41 am): Madam Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to your role. I rise to give my speech during the address-in-reply. First, I reconfirm my allegiance to Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia and head of the Commonwealth. I would also like to congratulate the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the recent birth of Princess Charlotte. I acknowledge in this House His Excellency the Governor for opening the 55th Parliament of Queensland. I would like to congratulate the Speaker and all of the temporary Speakers on their appointment. It is a role I proudly filled in the 54th Parliament. I would also like to congratulate the Premier, the new ministers and the new members of this House, particularly my colleagues on this side who won their seats for the first time.

I would like to acknowledge someone who spent a long time in this House, Mr Kerry Shine. He is the former member for Toowoomba North and a man who is well respected in the electorate. Since 1998, he has offered himself for public service to the electorate, winning four elections and losing three. The Labor Party can be proud of the effort that he and his team put into Toowoomba North and I thank him for his time in public office.

Toowoomba North was interesting during the campaign. We really got to see up close and personal democracy in action. On that note, I would like to thank all of the ETU members who came in from their outlying depots to campaign on the streets in Toowoomba. I hope the government are true to their word and they do not close their depots in the merger. About 100 of those ETU members are relying on this government and the members they backed to be in this place. The battle in Toowoomba was very much hand to hand, street to street, and both Labor and the union movement were very well represented—but so were we, and I would like to thank some of my team. My team put in a great effort to make sure that no stone was unturned and that I got returned to this place so that Toowoomba can have a local voice who can deliver for our region and for the people of the Darling Downs.

Whilst I do congratulate Kerry Shine for his service in here, I have to say that he got an 18.5 per cent swing during his time representing Labor in this House, yet he still could not deliver the second range crossing, he could not deliver a school at Highfields and he could not deliver a ring-road. These were all projects that waited between 15 and 30 years to get on the books in Toowoomba. Despite his big efforts and despite his big swing, Kerry could not interest the former Labor government to spend any money in our electorate—but back to my team.

There were some great members of my team. First and foremost was 'Big Jim', who hails from Barcaldine originally. He has been a tireless worker for many, many years on many, many campaigns. He is now in his late seventies but he put in a great effort on the ground for me and I sincerely thank him for it. There was also Mike Hogan, John and Nicole White, and the Goodwins, in particular Jenny, who all put a lot of time in. There were lots of members who have particular interests in families and making sure that we have strong representation for families in this electorate. I thank

Jeff and Pat Eacersall and their family. Some days there were three and four generations out on the street campaigning for me up against the ETU movement—paid organisers who were standing on the other side of the road.

My thanks also go to these people: Matthew Costello, who was out there all of the time working hard for me; Delis Kelly, who has had a fall this week and I hope she is feeling much better—she will tell me off for mentioning that she is in hospital at the moment but I hope she is feeling much better; Glenis Batten, who also came out and worked hard; and Neil Munroe, for his letters to the editor. I also thank my staff, Donna and Wendy, who do a fantastic job keeping the office operating. I sincerely thank all of those people and many others, including Dave Nicholls. They gave up plenty of time and plenty of their own resources in terms of trailers, cars and other things to try to make sure that the people of Toowoomba North are well represented in this place by someone who will ensure that we deliver for our region and that the government of the day understands the needs of Toowoomba and the Western Downs.

I would also like to thank my wife, Sue, and my children, Bri, Shan, Mason and Jordy—all of whom hit the streets hard campaigning. My wife would get a little embarrassed out on the streets so she would often hold the sign up in front of her face to make sure no-one could see it was actually her standing out there on the street, but I thank her for going out there. I know it is something that does not come naturally to her, particularly when there are 30 union officials standing over the other side of the road shouting at her. But, like I said, those guys had their opinion and they made sure they were heard in the electorate. I do thank my family for being there for me at that time.

**Mr Pearce** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I did not quite catch that but say it again. He does not want to say it again. If you are going to interject, do it loud so I can take the interjection. I would much rather you did that.

I would also like to thank a very special person and team who helped get me here in the first place and who I enjoyed working with in the last government. A lot has been said about Campbell Newman and the team that led the state for three years, but I would personally like to thank Campbell, Jeff and Tim for being our leadership team. For the first time in history, and really since the very first member for Toowoomba, John Watts, stood in this place and said we need a better range crossing than the one that existed—and that was in his very first speech, so we are talking about over 150 years ago—we had a Premier, a Deputy Premier and a Treasurer who not only listened to the people of the Darling Downs but also put their money where their mouth was and said they would fund and build the second range crossing. The second range crossing is the most significant issue that has been outstanding not just for the people of Toowoomba but for the people of the Darling Downs for at least 30 years. An efficient crossing means that the wealth that is produced west of the divide can arrive at the port and be exported so all Queenslanders can benefit from that industry and that productivity gain.

It is a road that took a little bit of vision, but it also took a special leadership team, led by Campbell, who was willing to say, 'Yes, we will commit to this.' We live in difficult financial times. We understand that we have inherited \$80 billion worth of debt. We understand that the interest bill is \$450,000 an hour. I would like to point out for those who were so concerned about the money spent on coins that that equals about 90 seconds of the interest bill that Labor left that just rolls on—on and on, every 90 seconds. Whilst they might talk about a few thousand dollars that were spent so that dignitaries can receive items of memorabilia when they visit Queensland, I would like to put it in some perspective for those opposite. Every 90 seconds the taxpayer of Queensland pays that amount of money to ensure that the interest bill for the debt that was incurred in their name by former Labor governments is paid. They should just think about that the next time they are standing here saying, 'There has been a terrible waste of money.' I am not suggesting that there should be any waste of money by government. We should treasure the taxpayer's dollar. We should make sure that when the people of Queensland, who work so hard to earn their money, pay their tax, they get the services and the facilities they deserve. That is why I am proud to be the member for Toowoomba North who was the representative when the second range crossing was announced. It should have been announced when I was in my twenties or late teens, but Labor governments left the people of Toowoomba and the people of the Darling Downs languishing on a road that is dangerous, that is inefficient and that reduces the productivity of every business west of the divide. I certainly would like to thank those from the former government who put in so much time, energy and effort as well as their families who sacrificed time with them to do all of those things.

Let me talk about a few of the things that we did achieve in the 34 months of the 54th Parliament in which I was the representative for Toowoomba North. I have already spoken about the first and foremost, the second range crossing. We waited 30 years for someone to stand up and do

something about it. Labor governments found loads of projects in Brisbane, the south-east corner and other places where they could spend money. When Kerry Shine first stood, it was No. 10 on the infrastructure priority list for Queensland. When he left office, it was No. 11. We have to ask why it was not moving up the list. It was because Labor governments do not care about people west of the divide.

Another project, which was not a sexy project, was a substation for the CBD of Toowoomba. When I was first told that we were going to spend \$74 million upgrading the power supply to the CBD of Toowoomba, I thought, 'How do you make the consumers, the Joe Public, the voters out there, actually realise that this is important?' Building a big substation is not the sexiest thing in the world. As good community members do, I asked my barber, 'What do you think?', and he said, 'That's amazing. That's fantastic,' and I was like, 'Why?' He said, 'Because when I turn on all the hair dryers at the same time the clippers won't work because the power supply to the CBD of Toowoomba is so antiquated that it drops to 180 volts at peak demand.' That is a piece of infrastructure that had not been upgraded since the early 1980s. It was originally established in the 1960s. Queensland's biggest inland city was wholly dependent on this antiquated piece of infrastructure that could have fallen over at any time. I certainly found it very interesting that that \$74 million was available.

Another project was the high school at Highfields. We hear from the other side, 'Oh yes, but we bought the land.' I just remind people—

**Mr Ryan:** Kerry Shine got the land.

**Mr WATTS:** That is right; Kerry Shine did get the land. Does the member opposite want to get the facts? I take the interjection and I thank him very much for it. In 2009 when I was the candidate for Toowoomba North we announced that we would be buying the land for the high school at Highfields. Bear in mind that at that time there was a member who had been in office for eight years and people had been asking him for the land. For eight years they waited. A week after we announced it, guess what? Magic pudding—'Oh we'll buy the land. We were always going to buy the land.' I put it to members opposite that they were not going to buy the land until such time as we announced it.

Let me go one step further. What happened then with that piece of land, because it was such a priority in the lead-up to 2009? What did they do with the land? They took 18 months to buy it and then they left it sitting there with no plan. In fact, the previous Labor government's 30-year infrastructure plan for the Darling Downs did not have listed a school at Highfields. They bought the land as a cynical move to try to secure votes in the 2009 election. It worked because I lost that election by 3.22 per cent. But the people of Highfields were not fooled so easily a second time. They knew that if they wanted a school built for the growing community out there, for the over a thousand children who were catching a bus every day into the centre of town, they needed an LNP representative who would have a strong local voice and who was capable of delivering for the region with a government that was willing to listen to people who live on the other side of the dividing range. Guess what? The school is open. It is a fantastic school. It has great—

**Mr Russo** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** That is right, the Highfields Ambulance Station. For nine years it was announced that they were going to put an ambulance station at Highfields. 'We're going to put an ambulance station at Highfields.' Guess what? The election came around, 'We'll do it soon.' Let's wait til the next election. 'We'll put an ambulance station at Highfields.' What happened after the election? 'We have not found the money for it.' I appreciate the interjection because that ambulance station now has 24 hours coverage, something it did not have before. It had three part-time staff. Now it has full-time coverage for all of the people of the north of my electorate. If members opposite have any other things that their member did not do while he was the local member, let me know and I will tell them how we fixed it up. They can keep them coming. I might need an extension of time or I will never get through.

Let me turn to a couple of other things. We did flood mitigation works. As everybody knows, Toowoomba suffered terribly in the 2011 floods. All of those works are nearing completion. It will not flood-proof the city, but it will certainly make it much more resilient and able to deal with flood. That was a Royalties for the Regions project. It was a \$45 million spend that went through the old rail yards, has redirected all of the water and smoothed East and West creeks and the confluence of those creeks. It also included \$5 million for an upgrade of a rail bridge to stop it acting as a dam when water does come down. I certainly thank the former deputy premier for that \$45 million. I look forward to hosting the new Minister for Main Roads to come and open it for us. The people of Toowoomba certainly deserve it, and it was a project that was very much needed.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I had ambulance upgrade on my list, but we have already covered that. So I will be able to leave that.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** There is also great growth in Toowoomba North—

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Grace): Order! Okay, members. The member has the call. Thank you.

**Mr WATTS:** It is interesting because there has been a mention of closing schools. In my electorate we did not close any schools. We opened up a school in an area where the former member left a thousand children catching a bus and travelling for over an hour every day in order to get to school. We built a school where it was needed. Where there were very low numbers we reviewed that because taxpayers' dollars need to be treasured and not wasted on doing things that are inefficient and ineffective. They need to be treasured because they have been hard earned by the general public. If people do want a local member who will deliver and will treasure that taxpayer dollar, they should make sure that at the next election they vote LNP. Clearly, we can see from those opposite that debt and deficit are still part of their DNA. I look forward very much to our 'tossing' Treasurer outlining his campaign and his budget.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Toowoomba North, I believe there was a ruling that that language was unparliamentary. I ask you to withdraw, please.

**Mr WATTS:** I withdraw the comment that the Treasurer is a 'tossing' Treasurer and say that he is a 'coin-flipping' Treasurer.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Toowoomba North, it has to be unreservedly withdrawn. I ask you to withdraw.

**Mr WATTS:** I unreservedly withdraw that comment. One of the hardest things for me on election night was when I realised that our government was not going to be returned as the government of the day. Let me tell honourable members why. There is a school campus in my electorate which has over 800 students—Toowoomba State High School at Wilsonton. They have been waiting for around 12 years to get an indoor sports facility and an arts facility so they do not have to stand out in subzero temperatures to do things.

I realised that, because we were not going to be returned as the government, those students will be left languishing and waiting again. I might just point out to those opposite, particularly to the education minister, that that is one of the highest Labor voting booths west of the great divide and has been for a very long time. There are over 800 children at that school who deserve the same facilities that exist in every other school in Toowoomba. Every other school in Toowoomba has one and they do not. It is one of the highest voting Labor booths, and Labor has left them to sit out in the cold and rain for their performances.

I will continue to fight for those people and I will present a petition on their behalf. I will insist on making sure that their voices are heard in this place. I will be a strong local voice for the people of Toowoomba—even those who do not vote my way—because they live west of the divide too and they deserve representation in this place, and that is what they will get from me.

I am sorry there are only 40 seconds left, because I would have liked to speak about the priority development area that was announced just prior to Christmas and the opportunity that that presents for inner-city renewal. I really hope that the now Deputy Premier has an opportunity to come and look at the rail yards precinct and the possibilities there. It might take some of the pressure off the inner-city living desires of those in the deputy chair's electorate, because we have an opportunity to create that atmosphere in Toowoomba. It is going to need a little bit of catalytic investment from the Deputy Premier. I would invite her to come up to Toowoomba and have a look at it, because people west of the divide deserve just as much attention from this government as do the people who live east of it.

*(Time expired)*