




Speech By
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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (8.43 pm): Before I start tonight I would like to wish my daughter Brianna a happy 18th birthday. I cannot think of a better place to be spending her 18th birthday than here with you good folks debating the Appropriation Bill. Happy birthday, Brianna.

People might ask what an Appropriation Bill is. Let us be very clear so that people know exactly what it is. It is a statement of how this government will spend the hard-earned working people of Queensland's money, how it will allocate the recurrent expenditure, what it will allocate to capital expenditure, as well as a statement about why the Labor government has chosen to do these things with the people of Queensland's hard-earned tax dollars.

I put it to members that many families and small business owners in Queensland are used to budgeting. They understand that it is hard work to earn a dollar and that it should be treasured and looked after by the people they elect to govern the state on their behalf. Unfortunately, this Treasurer cannot be trusted to look after the hardworking people of Queensland's money. We know that because he never told them about his sneaky plan before the election. He plans in the typical Labor way. He calls this a typical Labor budget. That must be why he never told anybody about it beforehand. We know that when they plan they plan not to tell people what it is they are going to do and then they do it after the election.

Make no mistake, this is a sneaky budget. It contains almost none of the Treasurer's thought bubbles from before the poll on 31 January—no merging of the electricity assets, Powerlink, Ergon and Energex, because the Treasurer knew that would not work. It was just part of a sleight of hand. That sleight of hand was designed for him to make his toxic magic pudding for the people of Queensland.

This Treasurer thinks of himself as a magician, as this House has been shown. This Treasurer, with his preprepared attempts at witty one-liners, also thinks of himself as a comedian. The hardworking people of Queensland who entrust their money with this Treasurer to administrate on their behalf wisely and carefully do not want a magician or comedian.

They want someone who has the capacity to understand that it is a good idea to make provision for holiday leave and that it is a good idea to make provision for retirement and someone who is honest, open and accountable. This week in this parliament we have seen sneaky and underhanded debt, deficit and deceit that the Treasurer and his Labor team have brought forward. That is right; this is a true Labor budget.

So we have a comical magician with a sneaky budget that relies on sleights of hand and fast talking to deceive the people as to what the true intent is. The magician relies on deception and sleight of hand, both of which this Treasurer has shown in this budget.

I want members to imagine for a moment that we are running a small business and that that business finds itself spending more money per year on expenses than it raises in income, a business that has debt at such a level that it urgently needs to be addressed or the interest payments will start to strip the working capital out of the business. The means that the business used to function effectively will be spent on the day-to-day running of the business.

What would we do if we were managing such a business? We could increase sales. In this case, that would mean raising taxes and that has been ruled out. We could curtail the business expenditure so that it was below our income. That would be good management. That was what was seen in LNP budgets. The Treasurer has ruled that out. Good management is not in Labor's DNA when it comes to money. We could sell a capital asset of the business and use it to pay down debt. The Treasurer has ruled that out this time, unlike the ghosts of Labor past that simply lied to the voters and then sold the assets.

Let us have a look at what our sneaky magician has done. Let us assume our small business is a family run business. Soon mum and dad who founded the family business will retire. They have been carefully putting away money over a long period of time to fund their retirement. They have handed management of the business over to their son who secretly wants to be on the stage with his magic tricks. Instead of respecting the provision for his parents' retirement, this Treasurer would spend that money on today's problems and leave his children to fund their grandparents' retirement with their hard work. It is so simple. This Labor Treasurer solves his problem by simply spending other people's money.

In this analogy the Treasurer spends his parents' retirement income on his consumption and leaves his children to look after their grandparents while he runs off to the circus. That is a pretty selfish budget. That is a pretty selfish way to run the state—to spend your parents' money on your lifestyle and leave your children to make sure their grandparents have a roof over their head in retirement. So I say to those members opposite who are so proud of the sneaky magician and his sleight of hand, who are busy laughing at his jokes: remember your children will not find it so funny when they have to pay for your retirement.

If it were the case that this Treasurer just chose to endanger the long service leave and defined benefit scheme of the Public Service, that would be foolish and short-sighted. But unfortunately it is worse than that. In addition to spending his parents' retirement, he will shift some of his mortgage payments to his children's electricity bill so that he can spend that money on this year's lifestyle choices.

So let me just clarify: first, the owner of this small business has spent his parents' provision for retirement and long service leave on short-term business expenses rather than control those expenses; and, not content with leaving his children to fund his parents' retirement, he shifts some of the mortgage payments on to his children's electricity bills. Is it any wonder that small business in this state are struggling when this is the financial wizard we have as our Treasurer. It is an example for them of exactly how not to run their business.

Imagine if a business in this state raided their employees' superannuation. Imagine if a business in this state made no provision for long service leave. Imagine the cries from the union movement if the building companies made no provision for the tradies' long service leave. Imagine what would happen if they took the mortgage borrowings and invested them in electricity assets without giving the person any choice in doing that—so they go to the bank, borrow some money and, instead of paying off your house, they are going to buy some electricity assets with it.

This is not how to run a state. This is not open and accountable. This is not keeping their word that they gave to the people of Queensland, and this is not respecting the people's hard-earned money. As always what we see is a Labor Treasurer who is willing to spend other people's money and one day it will run out and our children will be left with the legacy of this Treasurer's magic tricks.

Now I am not a qualified financial planner, but I do know that under law I am not allowed to use my superannuation to pay my credit card off, and for sure and certain I am not allowed to use someone else's superannuation to pay my credit card off. To take the provisions made for long service and retirement from our hardworking public servants is a disgrace.

This government came to office with no plan and no idea. Now it has a tricky plan and some sneaky ideas—and they are borrowing from your children's future instead of investing in it. People who have served and worked for this state as public servants have had the provision made for their long service leave and superannuation wrenched from their hands in an accounting trick that requires our children, our future generation, to guarantee this Treasurer's spending. This budget does nothing to address unemployment or boost business confidence.

We on this side of the House understand business. We understand that when you take hardworking people's money it needs to be invested wisely. It needs to be treasured. It needs to be protected from exuberance and whim. It needs to be managed well and invested for future generations. We on this side of the House want our children to have a better future and not have to pay for our retirement. We on this side of the House want to leave infrastructure and opportunity for our children, not debt and deficit. We on this side of the House simply want to live within our means and pay back the debt left to us by previous Labor treasurers.

The sneaky Labor Treasurer has given himself a funding holiday. There are a lot of people in my electorate who would like to have their superannuation payments to help them pay off their mortgage for the next five years and help them pay off their credit cards for the next five years, rather than pay for their retirement maybe in 20 or 30 or 40 years. This is a sham and I, for one, aim to expose it for what it is—poor management and poor leadership that will lead to a poor Queensland. If we can be in any doubt, ask the ratings agencies what they think of this plan.

Mr Costigan: They don't rate it.

Mr WATTS: I take that interjection from the member for Whitsunday, who should be in his seat. But they do not rate it.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): That is a very good point.

Mr WATTS: A review by the Under Treasurer informs us that we have no chance of handing our children a AAA credit rating. With this sneaky budget, both Moody's and Standards & Poor's have pointed to Queensland continuing with high debt.

I just want to clarify for members in the House why a AAA credit rating is important. It means that not only the Queensland government is paying merchant bankers more money for our loans because we do not have a AAA credit rating but so are all of our local councils. Everybody's rates are also higher in trying to deal with debt because the interest payments are higher.

It means that investors are not confident in the future of our state and the management of our finances. Anything less than a AAA credit rating is letting our children down. The world's capital looks for investment opportunities. It looks for stable government. It looks for areas with reduced sovereign risk, and they will shy away from Queensland if we keep heading down this path every time Labor is elected. Sneaky, tricky governments that have no plan or road that leads to effective repayment of borrowings is the Labor way. That is the true Labor budget.

Let's have a look at a few things that affect my electorate of Toowoomba North. The hardworking people of Toowoomba, the Darling Downs and certainly Toowoomba North have waited a long time for the Toowoomba second range crossing. As many would be aware, they have waited longer for this piece of infrastructure than just about the age of Queensland.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr WATTS: They have been waiting for a very long time. It took an LNP government to do a business case and announce this project. It took an LNP government to put it in their budget. It took an LNP government to start the procurement process, and it took an LNP government to make sure this project got up. I thank the minister in this Labor government for not letting this sneaky magician steal that money off the people of the Darling Downs and Western Queensland. It is a relief to the people of my electorate and the surrounding area that this road will be built. I urge the minister to ensure high levels of local content and local employment, because that is a major concern for people in Toowoomba and the surrounding area at the moment. I urge the minister to ensure that the conductivity of the New England Highway is only minimally disrupted as this long overdue project moves forward.

Let's have a look at some other capital expenditure in my electorate. The people of my electorate appreciate the continued funding of the Toowoomba central substation. This project was announced by an LNP government. It was in critical need of an upgrade because it was nearly 30 years old and it was failing to supply adequate power to the CBD. It was initiated by an LNP government and funded by an LNP government, and I appreciate the minister not allowing his sneaky magician to steal that money from the people of Toowoomba and continuing the funding of this project.

I am very much looking forward to the education minister coming to my electorate next week to open the Highfields State Secondary College. Everybody in Highfields and Toowoomba is rightly proud of this college—a project that had its first funding announcement during my 2009 campaign. We announced that we would purchase the land. A week later Labor announced they would purchase the land. After 18 months and some protracted discussions, they did purchase the land. But instead of investing in a school on that land after they had spent millions of dollars to purchase it, they just left it sitting there barren and wasting while a thousand kids got on buses to go to a school in town.

The people of Highfields could not understand why they had bought the land with no plan. I told them that that is the Labor way, as they can see from this. It took an LNP government to fund the high school to commence stage 1, and enrolments have exceeded expectations. The school is a fantastic example of what a modern education institution should look like in Queensland, and I hope the minister enjoys her visit. The funding of stage 2 is most welcome and the families of Highfields and Toowoomba North thank the minister for not abandoning them and not allowing this tricky Treasurer to limit their children's future education needs.

There is one great disappointment that I have spoken about many times in this House and will continue to speak about. The Wilsonton Campus of Toowoomba State High School is in a very hardworking part of my electorate. There is in fact only one high school campus in Queensland that has over 800 children—in fact, 850—with no plan for an assembly or sports facility to be built at any time in their future, and it is the Wilsonton campus. This is an incredibly disappointing aspect of this budget.

When I first took up the cause with the Wilsonton campus P&C to pursue their desire for an arts and sports hall, I thought the children of Wilsonton deserved to be treated at least equal to the rest of the children attending the state schools in Toowoomba. I had no idea that the neglect they were facing reached much further than the boundaries of Toowoomba. For 17 years, there has been no such facility on this campus, which opened in 1998. As I said, there is only one school in the state with over 800 children and no indoor facility—and no plan for one and no future funding for one.

It is a \$3.1 million project and I would encourage the minister, when she visits Toowoomba, to take the time to go to Wilsonton. They have no venue for a whole school assembly; they have no venue for indoor sporting activities; they have no venue for key student assessment tasks; they have no venue for fitness, dance, drama, music or school bands wanting to perform to an audience; they have no indoor sports included in their PE program; and they have no PE lessons when they have frequent adverse weather conditions. I can tell the House that in Toowoomba today that whole school had nowhere to shelter. There were 850 kids in temperatures of minus five with the wind chill factor and there was nowhere for them to go. How on earth do these children have a sense of pride in their school, a sense of pride in their suburb, an opportunity to celebrate school success and a sense of belonging? They are being badly let down.

The Deputy Premier spoke earlier about how excited she is for her son to be starting at Brisbane State High School and that they will be building some year 7 buildings. We had a year 7 building constructed last year, but I think Brisbane State High School has somewhere for the children to shelter on a windy day or a rainy day. This school at Wilsonton has not had a whole school assembly for many, many years because there is no facility that can hold them. I have 850 children asking me why the minister would neglect them and leave them shivering in the cold with nowhere to shelter. This area of my electorate is Labor heartland. The government should feel disgraced. These people voted 60 per cent for this government, and it is a slap in the face for them to leave their children standing outside on a windy day with nowhere to shelter. This is the only school in Queensland like this. I urge the minister not to listen just to me. I am happy to get bipartisan support and I will not bring it up again. All I want is for her to announce a facility for these children and she will not hear from me again. I will not gloat or make anything of it; I just want a facility built for these children.

We can show these families that this government will govern for all of Queensland, as it said it would. Remember, these people voted 60 per cent for this government and their children are standing outside—the only kids in Queensland to do so. I urge the minister to reprioritise her capital spending budget and find it in her heart to give the children of Wilsonton and their hardworking families the facility they deserve for their education. The school is 17 years old with 850 children, and it is the only school in Queensland with no indoor facility.

In the time I have left, I want to mention a few issues. In relation to the Toowoomba Hospital, I would like to thank the minister for looking at the business case that was done last year by the LNP government and allowing the funding for the MRI scanner to go into the hospital. That is a good outcome. I am disappointed the Royalties for the Regions program has not continued. It has done some great work on flood mitigation in Toowoomba and it has helped us deal with the stresses placed on us by the coal seam gas industry and other resource industries in our area. It was a good program that ensured regional services to the centre of Toowoomba could function and operate.

In summary, this government will continue funding projects that were started under the LNP. It has no new initiatives for the people of Toowoomba but it is gladly taking their money, increasing their car registrations and shifting their debt onto their electricity providers so that at some point in the future again—

(Time expired)