




Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2017

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (9.20 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Appropriation Bill 2017. As the smoke and mirrors slowly clear and we can start to see this budget for what it is, the first question we need to ask ourselves is: what exactly is a budget for? It is to tell the people of Queensland how the government plans to spend their hard-earned taxpayers' dollars delivering services and facilities for them. The question is: what sorts of services and facilities do the people of Queensland deserve and does this budget deliver on that? I put it to members—and the Minister for Education spoke about young children before—with a deficit growing to over \$80 billion, I wonder if those children will see that deficit cleared before they graduate from school to retirement, because with a couple of billion dollars a year surplus it is going to take maybe 40 years to pay back the deficit that Labor has racked up over the years. It is very important that people understand that that is seriously now starting to inhibit Queensland's ability to be able to provide the services, facilities and infrastructure that the people of Queensland might want.

In my electorate the question is: what do people want? There has been a lot of talk in this place about a railway crossing, and I am sure that that railway crossing in the south-east corner will be a fine thing for people to be able to get to work maybe 15 minutes earlier and home 15 minutes earlier and may take some cars off the road. The question is: is that the best use of our \$80 billion debt and the climb to that \$80 billion, or should we really be prioritising other things across Queensland? Will the children in grade 7 or 8 now be happy that when they are in their 50s and 60s they will be paying tax for these facilities and this infrastructure to be built?

In my region there is serious federal government money available for inland rail. The corridor needs to be finalised and the investment needs to be begin, yet I do not see any great information or anything across these documents that talks about inland rail. The problem I have with that is that inland rail would actually unleash the productive ability for companies to be able to compete internationally and therefore pay more tax and be able to help our economy grow and therefore help us pay our bills that we have been shackled with by the Labor Party over the years. We have a government now that certainly has the reputation of doing nothing and talking about what it might do or what it is thinking about doing but actually achieving very little.

Mr Power interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! Member for Logan, you are a serial interjector. If you persist, I will warn you under standing order 253A.

Mr WATTS: I think your reference with regard to the member for Logan was extremely polite, Madam Deputy Speaker. The question the people in my region have is: does this budget outline their fair share or does it really just give them the bare minimum—the scraps that are left—after the budget has been plundered by the south-east corner?

I turn to a pet project of mine—one that is interesting because, as the smoke and mirrors are placed around these things in the move towards an election, there are people who are trying to claim credit for various achievements, particularly in my electorate. I refer to the Wilsonton school hall at Wilsonton State High School. If we go to the record—that is, publications, questions and statements from various people—there have been countless articles with me talking and fighting for this and working very hard with people such as David van Tricht, who is the real hero of this project, in making sure that it gets delivered for the kids of Wilsonton. This is one of the harder areas in my electorate—areas where people do not have a lot but who are very proud of what they have—and it now has a wonderful school separate from Toowoomba State High School. It has its own independent identity and the school hall that is being delivered is a great thing for the school.

However, for a former member who really had absolutely nothing to do with it—in fact, they put out press releases saying how it could not be achieved—to start claiming credit because it is now being delivered is a long stretch. The person who should claim credit is David van Tricht. I was pleased to be able to be his strong voice representing our region in this place to make sure that his voice was heard, but I take no credit for it myself. I place the credit at his feet and that of the P&C and the community that fought for this facility. Just over 10 months ago the minister started talking about how this would be delivered, and in that time we have had a lot of talk about how it is going to be delivered and the fact that it will be wonderful and everything else. One of my concerns when it was said that it would be in the 2017-18 budget was that it would not be available for the 2018 academic year. When I wrote to the minister asking if we could get this hall—because that is what David and other people were asking me—ready for 2018, I was told that it would open late in term 2. Again, we pushed hard and we put leaflets into the community and started to make it a political issue so that the minister would feel the pressure. I am pleased to say that under that pressure from the community we will see this hall open for the academic year 2018, and that is a good thing. The P&C and the other community members involved in that should be very proud of that achievement.

Another thing that I am told that my community should be very pleased about—again, there are people out there trying to take credit for it—is the Highfields high school. There were claims made by someone who was in this place for 11 years who said, 'I was going to do this and I was going to do that.' The first time there was a serious commitment made to buy the land for the high school was seven days after Lawrence Springborg came to the electorate when I was the candidate in 2009 and we announced that if we won government we would be buying the land for the high school. A week later—after years of inaction—it was announced that the Labor Party would buy the land for the high school. To its credit, it did buy that land. It took just over two years I think from memory, but then it just sat there and did nothing. There was no progress, there was no allocation, there was no money, there was no opportunity. Quite cynically, in the lead-up to an election all of a sudden that high school—and the real champion of that cause was Bronwyn Cairns, who had been fighting for many years, but polling would have indicated which way the 2012 election was going to go—was miraculously going to be built after years of inaction.

This is another example of more smoke and mirrors. The school was funded and built by the LNP. I am pleased to say that there is funding in this budget for the next stage. I am concerned about that funding because there is only \$1.86 million and the school is very well attended and has many students going into year 10. In the forwards there is \$9.3 million in the outyears, but I believe that money should be spent sooner than that on the campus because the campus is going to be bursting at the seams very shortly. It is a good thing that people such as Bronwyn and others who fought hard for that school can see that going forward, even though her children sadly missed the opportunity to attend that school because it took the former member so long to get the job done. It is a good thing that we have \$1.86 million in the budget, but let us not get too excited about it.

Something else I am completely cynical about, and I have been told not to be churlish about, is that in the lead-up to an election it is announced that we are going to get a police station at Highfields. I absolutely support a police station at Highfields. It is a \$2.9 million project. I would ask members to be a bit quiet if that would be alright.

Mr Furner interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Member for Toowoomba North, if you could direct your comments through the chair, please, and Minister for Local Government, if you could not have conversations across the chamber.

Mr WATTS: The amount of \$100,000 out of a \$2.9 million project has been announced. I support the \$100,000. If they were serious about getting this done and if it was not just a political grab for an area where my political opponent was slaughtered for his inaction at the last election one would suggest

that maybe they would allocate a bit more money than that. I would ask the minister to consider that. That \$100,000 is welcomed and will move the project forward. The land has been sitting there for a period of time. In fact, there were two blocks of land for it when we came to government. But I digress.

I would like to talk about the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, which is noted in the budget. I see the \$1.2 billion or so of federal government money is counted in the budget figures. I am sure the federal government is very pleased that that money is counted in the figures here. It should be celebrated that this project got up. Interestingly enough, I did some research on my predecessor in relation to that as well. I found that in the 11 years in his time in this place there were three questions about the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing. I am told now that it was delivered by him and everything was in the bag. The last press release we see is trying to shrink it down to a three-lane road, compromising because the poor member could not get any support out of the Labor Party in this place. I felt a bit sorry because, try as he might, he was not taken seriously.

This budget is a south-east-corner-centric budget, with billions of dollars to be spent on a project here. Obviously that affects projects in other places. The range crossing is a good project. Interestingly enough, one of the statements that was made in here was celebrating the tunnel being drilled. Ian Macfarlane should be thankful because the land purchase for the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing was 100 per cent funded by the federal government at \$30 million, the exploration tunnel was 100 per cent funded by the federal government at \$5 million and the study to look at all of the geotech was 100 per cent funded by the federal government. That did not stop the Labor member from taking credit for achieving that. One needs smoke and mirrors when one is trying to present himself to an electorate with empty hands.

We do not see anything great coming out of this budget. We should be focusing on creating jobs and better management of our finances. One of the greatest job-creating opportunities that exists is inland rail and what do we have? Crickets! It is a great opportunity for us to become productive in our region and for our exporters to reduce their logistic costs forever. Is there a couple of billion dollars in the state government budget for that great job-creating project? No, there is not. As to better management of our finances, we are cracking through that \$80 billion debt. It will be 40 or 50 years before the kids in high school today can finally pay that off. They are looking forward to paying off the debt for all that those opposite have delivered.

What is fantastic about Toowoomba is its great families. It is a livable community. The former deputy premier worked hard with me to get a priority development area up. That priority development area needs catalytic funding to get it underway. There is a wonderful opportunity for a 10-hectare inner-city parkland that would encourage the priority development area to take off, but what have we seen since this government came to office? Not much. It has finally, begrudgingly given a few dollars for the goods shed, but that priority development area that the former deputy premier worked so hard to deliver in the heart of Toowoomba cannot thrive and take off until there is some catalytic investment which would unleash the economic potential of the surrounding areas and, in fact, would start to come back in land tax and other forms as people started to develop. That would have helped create a good, strong family area for our communities to go and enjoy in the inner city.

We have spoken about building roads and infrastructure in our region. I will list off a couple that we did and then I will go to—actually, there is not much happening so I will not waste my time going through that. We spent \$54 million on flood works and building the Victoria Street bridge, a project that languished for 12 years as the No. 1 infrastructure priority for the Toowoomba Regional Council. Whilst Labor were here they would not help them. That job was funded and finished. There were the flood works to protect the CBD. There was the \$6 million railway bridge to help protect the CBD that allowed the waters of West Creek to travel underneath it.

There is also the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing. There are many, many people to thank for that. Both Tim Nicholls, the member for Clayfield, and the deputy premier played a massive role, along with Scott Emerson, the member for Indooroopilly, in ensuring that project was funded and delivered. The Labor Party machine goes into action and airbrushes itself into history. When the pictures were taken they were not standing there, but all of a sudden they appear like a cryptic ghost in the background. Suddenly they were the catalyst for it happening after 11 years of complete inaction. I digress again.

The next question is how best we can run the government. This government cannot even meet its own target for a Public Service. We see the Public Service growing like Topsy. I am all for making sure the people of Queensland are well served, the question is who pays for it? At the moment it is our children and our grandchildren who will be paying taxes to pay for these increases that are beyond our reach.

What do we see coming from our side? We see a freeze on registration. Earlier, the member for Brisbane Central scoffed at \$200. That might be the case if you are earning a ministerial salary, but for families in my region a \$200 saving from the freezing of car registration would be wonderful. Certainly for my children, who recently bought their first cars, it would be wonderful, because they do not have hundreds of thousands of dollars as the minister does. It is very important and very valuable. It shows that we are serious about trying to reduce people's cost of living.

In summary, we find a lot of smoke, a lot of mirrors, a bit of airbrushing and the claiming of other people's work. If someone at university started doing this they would be done for plagiarism—copying other people's work and handing it in as their own. I forgot to mention the \$130 million cut in road funding in my region. That is just a drop in the ocean when compared with the \$2 billion being spent down here! This budget is a lot of smoke, mirrors and airbrushing to ensure nothing ever happens with regard to the good LNP projects in my region where all the groundwork was completed. Going forward, I am very concerned for my region without the investment we need from this government.

(Time expired)