




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2018

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (8.11 pm): I rise to speak on this year's budget bills. Everywhere in Queensland, from my electorate of Maiwar to the Far North, in country towns and remote communities, people know that politics and politicians are failing them. Queenslanders are under pressure from low wages, high rents and mortgages, high power bills and underfunded public services. After a century of the broken two-party system, decades of unfettered crony capitalism, rampant inequality and now facing the impending catastrophe of dangerous climate change, people have had enough. They see the system as broken.

The Greens are not content with incremental change, and nor should any of us be. I was elected on a genuinely transformational platform that would create a future that works for all of us. To give everyone a better life we need to tax big corporations properly, which means taking on the power of the corporate donor class. The government has made some small but commendable steps forward with the new luxury taxes and the waste levy, but they simply do not raise the revenue we need to support Queenslanders in the ways they need, to live the life they deserve.

As a first step, the Greens want to make sure property developers and mining companies pay their fair share. Right now, developers in Queensland get \$2.3 billion of free money every year as land gets rezoned and the value of that land goes up. Coal and gas companies are paying incredibly low royalty rates by international standards meaning we are still missing out on the benefits of the mining boom. As we transition away from coal, we need to collect these mining profits to fund a cleaner future.

A Greens budget would raise an extra \$30 billion over five years with a developer tax and fairer coal and gas royalties. With that money, we could build 200,000 beautiful, well-designed social homes to create universal housing. Our plan would end homelessness within three years and abolish the social housing waiting list.

Before public health and education, people thought universal health care and education were impossible dreams. Real change starts by rejecting old ideas and the old parties' assumptions. With our plans to make big corporations pay their fair share, we could cut power bills by \$600 per year and run the whole state on 100 per cent clean energy by 2030. We could make sure that clean energy stays in public ownership so that energy transition creates the kind of good, steady jobs that sustain communities in the long term. We cannot let the transition to clean energy become privatisation by stealth, but that is exactly what is happening at the moment.

We could create \$1 public transport fares across the state and free travel for kids. As well as building Cross River Rail, we could extend our public transport network even further so that people in regional cities enjoy access to modern, efficient transport that saves them money and cleans up our cities.

We could create a public infrastructure bank that could fund the schools, hospitals and green space that Queenslanders need and deserve. All of these things are possible, but right now the riches of the mining boom and the development boom flow straight into the pockets of big corporations. Until Labor and the LNP stand up to the corporate donor class, truly transforming the lives of Queenslanders will remain a pipe dream.

The kind of wholesale, transformative change the Greens and I envisage are rooted in community and built on lifelong educational opportunities. That brings me back to what this budget means for Maiwar, and in particular the funding committed for local schools. I would like to start by simply acknowledging what outstanding schools we have in Maiwar, both private and public. Burgeoning enrolment numbers reflect just how many families want their children to enjoy the education offered in these schools, but they are also a symptom of the rampant overdevelopment being experienced in many parts of the electorate.

Planning for this level of development, and the provision of public infrastructure to cope with the population growth, has simply been inadequate. Whether because of the false assumption that families would not want to live in units or simply as a consequence of demographic shift, schools in Maiwar, and particularly state schools, are not keeping pace with demand.

Indooroopilly State High School, the only catchment based state high school in the electorate, is now pushing 2,000 students—having effectively doubled in size over the last decade. A number of the primary schools are also bursting at the seams, such as Ironside and Indooroopilly state schools. Student numbers are now at the point that hundreds of students are unable to get a spot in outside school hours care.

It is great to see more than \$7½ million allocated for work at Indooroopilly State School and more than \$15 million for Indooroopilly State High School. These schools are desperately in need of these new and refurbished facilities. I know the school principals, Keith Warwick and Lois O'Reilly, and all their students are suitably excited about the difference these facilities will make to their educational experience.

The government has almost followed through with its commitments to Maiwar primary schools, but I have some concern that they are being short-changed. Labor's candidate for Maiwar made commitments to fund new or improved infrastructure at Bardon, Milton and Toowong state schools. These commitments were still available online until fairly recently but the website has now been taken down, so I will table three printouts of media pages from Ali King's website, for the information of the House.

Tabled paper: Bundle of documents regarding budget funding for schools [\[914\]](#).

In relation to each of these commitments, the budget appears to deliver almost 20 per cent less than promised. Now, I would be happy to be corrected if there is in fact some more schools funding squirreled away in a dark corner of the budget, but it looks for all money like Labor is underdelivering for Maiwar's primary school students, in terms of both the amount promised for these projects and the time frames for delivery.

I would suggest that meeting these commitments would have been a bare minimum for our local schools, given the issues I mentioned a moment ago. It is not entirely clear how the expanded Building Future Schools program might be applied to address the needs of these and all of Maiwar's state schools, but I look forward to finding out more through the estimates process. Underfunding and schools' struggles to keep up with population and development pressures are really just emblematic of a much broader issue, which I have raised in this House more than once.

Development in Queensland is fundamentally skewed in favour of developers' profits, and the development boom is continuing at the expense of Queensland communities. Developers simply are not paying their fair share. We have not seen a single bit of green space added to Maiwar in recent years, but this has not escaped the attention of Maiwar locals in amongst the overwhelming pace of development. Infill development is to some extent inevitable, but as families like mine continue to move into those townhouses and units, public space becomes our backyard. Green space is constantly undervalued in planning and development but invaluable to our communities. Yet, it keeps disappearing while opportunities to regain green space slip past.

The community has been crying out for years for governments to turn the old ABC site at Toowong into what would be amazing riverfront green space. Instead of putting the community first, it has been sold off to developers who have not yet found a way to make a profit off it. It still sits wasted, while the surrounding suburbs continue to crowd out.

Traffic is an ongoing concern in Maiwar, like in so many other urban electorates. Transport planning 101 tells us that spending on roads can only ever be a temporary fix and that, as population grows, people need incentives to leave their cars behind to use active and public transport. Instead, we continue to see public transport usage declining.

Cross River Rail is precisely the kind of investment we need to transform and modernise our public transport system and get people back on buses and trains. I absolutely support the government's ongoing commitment to this project, but we cannot pretend this is a panacea to all our public transport woes, particularly in the western suburbs. It is time to take meaningful steps towards a western busway. I have little doubt that the members for Mount Ommaney and Moggill and their voters would agree that this warrants government attention and investment immediately.

I have no doubt that the residents of South Brisbane would be as excited as Maiwar residents are at the prospect of the much needed active transport bridges between Toowong and West End and West End and St Lucia as ways to keep healthy and reduce inner-city congestion. Better schools, hospitals, greenspace, public and active transport facilities are all achievable, but only if government chooses to make them an absolute priority. It is all about choices.

I think I have heard virtually every member in this House, from both sides, talk about the needs of their local schools in their contribution to this debate. If we agree that more money is needed to improve this kind of basic public infrastructure and to better support communities across the state, why is it so hard to accept that this must be funded by redistributing burgeoning corporate profits? Until Labor and the LNP make big corporations pay their fair share, we will continue to miss opportunities to invest in positive, forward-thinking and visionary infrastructure. There is more than enough to go around, but the fear of taking on the corporate class continues to hold governments back.

In the time I have remaining I would like to look at a handful of other issues and how they are dealt with in the budget. I could go on all night, and I am sure members would like to hear that! Queensland is in a housing crisis: one in five people are in rental or mortgage stress; 29,000 people are on the social housing waiting list—some of them have been on there for 10 years; and 20,000 people are homeless. After years of profit driven development, the private market has failed to deliver affordable, well-designed, livable homes. Instead, it has delivered enormous profits for a wealthy few and locked many people out of the housing market completely.

Every single housing and homelessness advocacy organisation says that the solution to our crisis is to build more social housing homes. We would never accept the state government turning children away from schools or patients away from hospitals just because we had not invested enough in public education or health care. Yet that is exactly what is happening in housing. Labor's plan for social housing appears to be more of the same—business as usual. We cannot accept that as a society, as a parliament. The Greens believe that housing is a fundamental right. We believe that everyone deserves a home. It is easy to dismiss this type of idea as 'radical', but I completely disagree. I think it speaks to the kind of society those critics are willing to accept. I do not want to accept a society where thousands of people sleep rough while expensive apartments sit empty night after night.

I turn now to Labor's plan to build new prison cells. If we are serious about real community safety, we cannot rely on building new prisons or expanding existing prisons. Labor has proudly boasted about spending a total of \$241 million to expand Capricornia Correctional Centre to add 348 new cells. Overcrowding is a serious issue, especially in women's prisons, but the solution to over-imprisonment is to reduce the number of people behind bars, not to build new cells. Providing adequate economic security, good health care, education and social services for disadvantaged groups at risk of criminalisation is more effective than locking people up.

As well as those basic necessities, as the former chief of Queensland Corrective Services Keith Hamburger has said, we should be looking at legalising and regulating cannabis, since 27 per cent of all offences in Queensland are illicit drug offences. This budget put \$169 million into more police officers but not one extra dollar into legal assistance for marginalised and criminalised people. I call on Labor to invest more in our communities instead of building new prisons. Labor is spending \$13 million in part to add 12 beds at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville. The Greens applaud the government finally acting to get 17-year-olds out of adult prisons, but it is unacceptable that our youth prisons are so overcrowded that extra beds were required.

Kids do not belong in prison. One way to help ease the over-imprisonment crisis is to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years old. Raising the age would help fix our shocking, obscene over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in detention. Of all the 10- to 17-year-olds behind bars in Queensland in 2013-14, 65 per cent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Linked to the over-criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is their serious over-representation in the child protection system. I urge the government to do more and find more funding to address that grave injustice and stop a second stolen generation.

Climate change was a disappointing and extraordinary omission from the Treasurer's budget speech on Tuesday. No-one will dispute the need to fund reef water quality improvement initiatives. I support the government's commitment to this, but the budget proposes no new spending to lessen our climate impact, only measures to 'manage the impacts of climate change'. This is a surprisingly Newmanesque approach to climate change policy. Water quality improvements will not save the reef if we do not urgently and drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is no doubt that this is a global problem and that brings us directly, albeit briefly, to that elephant in the room again—Adani.

The greatest contribution Queensland can make to protect the global climate is to keep our coal in the ground. Instead, our government still supports this coal billionaire. Adani has been exempt from paying for unlimited groundwater extraction, whereas farmers continue to pay for this precious resource. We are still waiting for the government to abandon whatever secretive deal exists for Adani to delay payment of royalties. In fact, most Queenslanders are simply waiting for the government to draw a line under this project altogether so Queensland politics can move forward without this albatross around its neck.

In closing, despite my many concerns, I support this budget. I commend the government's willingness to invest big in infrastructure and find new revenue from luxury taxes—but I urge the government to go further. I urge the government to cut off corporate donors and reset the balance between the haves and the have-nots. I urge the government to take the bold steps necessary to support a fairer, better, more sustainable future for all of us.