




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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MOTION

Referral to Education and Small Business Committee

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.10 pm): What an interesting motion brought by the same Labor Party that referred the very powers it now wants to investigate to another jurisdiction. It seems strange that some people on the other side enthusiastically held the view that we should permanently give up powers of this chamber to another jurisdiction, yet now we have a motion to reach into that jurisdiction.

Mrs D'ATH: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The referral of the powers that happened many years ago is not the substance and not in any way part of the scope of this referral to a committee. It is about wage theft.

Mr BLEIJIE: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The motion talks about the economy, the community, ABNs, sham contracting arrangements, wage theft. It is the federal jurisdiction and it is a direct correlation to the federal industrial relations powers, not those of the state.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Thank you, member for Kawana. Please resume, member.

Mr WATTS: This is a bizarre situation. We are planning to spend Queensland taxpayers' money looking into certain practices when, even if some of those practices exist, the jurisdiction to do anything about them has been handed over. I do not think that is the best investment for Queensland taxpayers' money. In the amendment, we see reference to another example of something that was not a great investment of Queensland taxpayers' money, which, of course, is the Health payroll debacle. That approximately \$1.2 billion error caused enormous stress and pain in the community. I have had a nurse—

Ms Grace interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for McConnel!

Mr WATTS: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am about to talk about a constituent of mine who is suffering from cancer and, as a former nurse, is being pursued for an overpayment. She has asked me not to disclose her details, so I will not. However, we are talking about a long time ago. My constituent was paid, underpaid, overpaid and incorrectly paid. She was completely messed around, which put a lot of stress into her life. Now, whilst suffering from cancer, she is being pursued for an overpayment, but no evidence is being put forward of that overpayment. They just say, 'We think it is this number'.

The amendment to the motion is critical to ensure that, once and for all, we put to bed the Labor Health payroll debacle. It has been a blight on the Queensland Labor Party, which made such a mess of paying people. Strangely enough, some of those people are being defended by their unions in the wage claims and other things that they are being pursued for. If we are going to have an investigation into so-called wage theft, we certainly need to look at the Health payroll debacle, the psychological and

health impacts of it, the underpayments and overpayments and the relentless pursuit of people, many of whom have now left the Public Service, some through stress, some through illness and some of their own accord.

All of those things were caused by a completely incompetent Labor government and the implementation of a payroll system to pay one of the most critical work sectors in the public service of Queensland, that is, the people who look after our sick, our aged and those who need help and support. That workforce was very badly treated because of their incompetence. If we are going to spend taxpayers' money, we should spend it investigating that.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr WATTS: I take the minister's interjection, because she is relentlessly interjecting.

Ms Grace: You sacked them.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WATTS: If the minister would stop for just one moment and allow the person with the call to talk—

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Ms Grace interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Chatsworth and member for McConnel.

Mr WATTS: The simple point is that, in my electorate, I too stood up and said that we needed to make sure we treated the Public Service with humanity and that we acted carefully. The minister can go and check the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, because I was very clear on my position. The point was this: the people who did leave the Public Service received the most generous redundancy payments that any public servant had been offered in Queensland. I am happy to say that I did stand up for the Public Service in Toowoomba and I was counted. That is my first point. My second point is that—and again I have not been given permission to share details—I received many requests from people who were looking for redundancies at that time. They were only too happy to take the redundancy package and move on, although not for a moment do I suggest that that was everybody.

The simple fact is that the failed Health payroll system was a complete debacle. When the minister stands to address the House on this issue, she needs to be able to put her hand on her heart and say, 'No, we will not investigate the complete disaster that was the Health payroll system, because there are no unresolved issues.' We know there are unresolved issues and, if you are true to your word about the treatment of public servants in Queensland, you will support, at the very least, part (h) of this amendment.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair.

Mr WATTS: Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the very least the minister should support an investigation into the payroll debacle. There is a more recent occurrence that I want to raise, although there are only a few minutes left on the clock. I have worked in the security industry in Queensland. It is a tough industry. It is an industry where you often work late shifts and long hours. You have to abide by many laws. Lots of training is involved. It is a difficult industry. Often you get moved to various locations because of functions, activities and everything else.

We know that for the Commonwealth Games to be held in Queensland several exemptions needed to be made for interstate operators so that their security guards could work here. It is incumbent on this government to make sure that those people are paid correctly, as was agreed, and on time. That is clearly not happening.

I am sure the minister will be strongly supporting the second part of the amendment to the Premier's motion as well. As someone who stands up for workers, why would the minister not support the amendment to investigate the underpayment and non-payment of people who recently worked at the Commonwealth Games held in Queensland. I think that part of the amendment should also be strongly supported. I look forward to the minister's contribution supporting that part of the amendment. The first two parts of the amendment should clearly be supported if we are talking about a just and proper investigation.

The last part of the amendment is quite interesting. The unions themselves are always looking to make sure that they have maximum full-time or FTE employment, particularly in the public sector. They are concerned about contractors, consultants and labour hire workers in the Queensland Public Service. Let us have a look at that. Let us have a bit of a fish. Let us see what is going on in that space and find out whether or not the Together union has a good point. Then let us enact legislation in this place based on the advice and research that comes forward from such an investigation.

I look forward to the minister's contribution in relation to the member for Kawana's amendment to the motion which supports our nurses, supports our security guards who made sure we were safe at the Commonwealth Games and supports our workers in the Queensland Public Service not to find themselves in competition with labour hire, consultants and contractors. I look forward to the minister's contribution.

(Time expired)