




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.24 pm): The member for Capalaba is quite correct. This budget does deliver—new taxes at a cost of \$2.25 billion a year. Worse than that, and probably most importantly, the failure of this budget is its ballooning debt. We will have \$83 billion worth of debt, so after a generation of Labor governments it will take four generations to repay. To put that into some perspective, if poor baby Elizabeth—our five millionth Queensland resident—spends her entire life with \$1 billion surplus budgets, with the money being used to pay back the debt she will be 83 before the debt is paid back. She will have to pay a billion dollars over and above what is spent on the services she receives in her lifetime to pay for the services that the Labor government has run up in one generation by overspending.

We will end up in a situation where we have \$10 million a day in interest payments. If it were not so disturbing it would be funny. Imagine the 93 of us here each having an extra \$40 million, roughly speaking, to spend in our electorates with no change to the bottom line of our budget. Everything else that we are doing could be done, and we could all have an additional \$40 million to spend in our electorates per annum if only we did not have to pay the debt. By not addressing debt we are giving an intergenerational time bomb to our children. When we talk about their education and how they are our most important resource—and I agree with all of those things—why would we burden our most precious resource, our children, with a time bomb of \$83 billion? This budget fails miserably because it does not address that.

There are other failings: taxes. The taxes that are introduced in this budget, \$2.25 billion, would roughly speaking—not quite—pay for our police force and its services on their own. We are talking about the same amount of money we commit to our police force. As a shadow minister, I have the privilege to represent the areas of Corrective Services and police. The interest that we are paying on the time bomb of debt is a billion dollars more than the cost of running the police and Corrective Services. The entire budget for police and Corrective Services is a billion dollars less than the interest we pay to some merchant bankers. That is the problem we have with this budget. We cannot provide the services that Queensland deserves because of this debt time bomb.

Let us have a look at what has happened to the police budget. There were lots of things said by the minister about how great the budget is for the police and how he is very serious about making sure the police get what they want, so let us go to road safety. The underspend in the 2017-18 budget on road safety was \$9 million and this year's budget has been slashed by \$8 million, so in two years a total of \$17 million has been slashed and heartlessly cut out of our road safety budget. I assume we have no road safety problems in Queensland. If we are taking \$17 million out of the road safety budget across two years, I assume we have no problem. I would be interested to hear the minister come in here and tell us that we have no problem with road safety and that is why \$17 million has been ripped out over 24 months.

Let us look at what is happening across Queensland. Robberies are up 26 per cent, assaults are up 11 per cent, home invasions are up 12 per cent and car thefts are up 19 per cent. What is the response of this government to these shameful increases in crime throughout our community? This government's response in 2017-18 was an underspend of \$40 million. The government came in here, brought down a budget and said, 'This is what we are going to spend to drive down crime,' but it underspent by \$40 million while robberies were going up 26 per cent. That is shameful, but what will happen in 2018-19? What is in this budget? Some \$36 million is carved out, slashed away. I ask again: if crime and public order are doing so well in Queensland, why are we taking \$76 million out of the budget over two years? It is absolutely shameful. I cannot believe that robberies are up 26 per cent yet the budget has been slashed by \$76 million across two years. Why would you do such a thing? It is unbelievable that someone could think that means they are doing a good job running the department.

As I said, this could easily be solved, not only by spending the money that is allocated in the budget. I really hope that the money allocated in this budget is not underspent as much as last year's budget was, because the Police Service needs our support. It needs the services, the numbers of police and the capability to drive down crime such as robberies, which are up 26 per cent. We want to drive that down. How will we do that? By putting police out on the beat. What happened in 2016-17? How many additional police were added in 2016-17? Three police were added. Meanwhile, assaults are going up by 11 per cent. It is unbelievable that you would do that.

To show how weak this minister has been about his portfolio, let us look at FTEs. We see the number of the FTEs in the Public Service growing. We are told it is for front-line services, so let us assume that numbers are growing on the front line. We see an increase of about 15 per cent across the so-called front-line services, but what do we see in Police? Over a three-year period—from March 2015 to March 2018—we see a 2.7 per cent increase in boots on the ground. You would think with such a minor increase that crime must be going so well and that we are driving crime rates down in this state, but we do not see that happening. We have a slashed and cut budget, we have a lower increase in FTEs than all the other services are getting and we have a weak minister who will not stand up and strengthen the Police Service to make sure crime rates in this state are driven down.

It is absolute lunacy to come in here and suggest that this government is tough on crime while it takes \$70 million out across two years. I look forward to the day of estimates, when we can dig down into these numbers and find out what services, what officers and what stations have been left short and overworked and where crime reports are not being investigated on time—not because of a lack of hard work on the part of our Police Service and not because they are not making their very best efforts but because they simply do not have the resources and the numbers they need to do the job they have been burdened with by this government.

As unemployment goes up we see more and more problems arising in some of our communities. The law and order response to that needs to be an increase. Instead we see slashing and cutting in funding. That is shameful. The government should not come in here and laud the merits of this Appropriation Bill while leaving our police exposed on the front line and leaving the community of Queensland vulnerable to being assaulted, attacked and robbed because it has not stood up for law enforcement.

A lot of the other public servants on the front line have really strong unions, so I wonder if the reason the minister has not been able to get the same numbers as some of those areas is that he is in the wrong faction. If he is, I beg the Premier to appoint someone to law and order who is in the strongest faction so that we can see some serious money being poured into the Police budget. It certainly needs to improve. This sneaky, untrustworthy minister has shown his incompetence in managing the portfolio by slashing money out of it and telling us it is a good thing.

I will move on from the police portfolio to talk about a couple of other things related to my electorate and my shadow portfolio. We have been told that there will be a new police station at Highfields. It was much lauded in the election campaign. There was \$100,000 in last year's budget for planning. That amount was underspent by \$30,000, so they did not manage to get all the way through the announcement they made during the election campaign. This year do we see construction starting, trenches being dug or the station being built? No. Out of a \$2.8 million budget we see another \$100,000 for a bit more planning. Let us hope that amount is not underspent. Let us hope the plan is finished and we can get on with building the police station that the people of Highfields deserve. It is the same with the Newtown police beat—a much lauded police beat in my electorate that needs attention. We have heard an awful lot of talk but we have not seen a lot of action.

Another issue in my electorate is the master plan for Baillie Henderson. We have heard that this is the biggest Health budget ever. What a load of nonsense! Every year is the biggest Health budget ever. In fact, under the LNP the average increase was seven per cent a year. What do we find under

the Palaszczuk Labor government? The increase is four per cent. It is actually a cut of three per cent on what we were spending on Health. It is not a real increase at all; the government has not kept pace with the extra money we were putting into Health. The government has cut it by three per cent.

Locally we need the master plan for Baillie Henderson to be finished and we need to get on with the moving of the hospital to Baillie Henderson. Someone needs to be brave enough to stand up and say, 'This is what we are going to do.' They need to plan it and get on with it. That way we can eke the life out of the building we have and the hospital we have, which gives a great service. A great hospital and health board is running that, but it needs the government to get off its back and allow it to plan to build a new hospital at Baillie Henderson. That is what we need locally.

Time is short, but I want to speak about the intersection of North and Ruthven streets. This is something that came up during the campaign. I was campaigning on it; the Labor Party told us the money was in the budget. The money has been in the budget, but I do not see any action. The people who drive that road every day cannot get through the intersection. They are not interested in hot air and numbers on paper that never materialise. They are only interested in someone fixing up the intersection. I very much hope we see work starting on that intersection.

I want to talk about the cost of living. We know that people across Queensland are feeling the pinch of the rising cost of living. I want to talk about electricity. People need to understand that, when they plug in the kettle and turn it on, they are paying a 47 per cent tax to this government. That is the money that will end up back in government coffers. That is driving up electricity prices and the cost of living. We just need to be honest about it and say, 'The simple fact is that that is a tax.' That is why that exists.

I will briefly talk about the impact of the cut in the First Home Owners' Grant, the waste tax and the land tax. This will result in an impact of about \$8,000 per new home. That will have a massive impact on the people in my electorate who are trying to get ahead and want to buy their first home. They have been saving up but suddenly find themselves \$8,000 behind where they were. They might have to rent for a bit longer and work harder to achieve their goal. It is a shame we do not have more time to talk about things that are very important to my electorate. I think air-conditioning classrooms is a great thing.

The LNP really needs to get into government, because we will guarantee no new taxes, we will guarantee to reduce the cost of electricity and we will ensure better health and education services. People should not be fooled by all of the rhetoric in this place about the record Health budget. In fact, the increase is three per cent lower than the increase to the Health budget delivered in our three budgets in government. People should not fall for it. They should watch out for sneaky, untrustworthy, union controlled ministers saying one thing in this place but doing a different deal behind the scenes. Only an LNP government will be able to bring prosperity back—

(Time expired)