




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.37 pm): I rise to give my address-in-reply speech. I am a little bit surprised to be doing it this late in the year but, with the part-time parliament we have, I will take the opportunity now to say a few words. It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be re-elected as the member for Toowoomba North to ensure that the constituents whom I represent have a strong local voice in this place. To them, I apologise that the Labor government has tried to quieten that voice by reducing the opportunities that I have to speak on issues and legislation that affects their and their family's lives.

Prior to the last election, there was a redistribution of electorates. The people of my electorate strongly wanted to ensure that particularly the Highfields region remained part of the Toowoomba North electorate. There was a big push by the Labor Party to cut out the Highfields area and put it into an electorate located much further north. There were strong objections to that and I was pleased that the redistribution allowed me to carry on representing the Highfields area—an area that I love, an area that I have lived in and an area in which I would like to think the people have seen the delivery of many things, including the high school. I thank the voters and the constituents of the electorate of Toowoomba North for giving me this opportunity to be their strong local voice in this place.

I would also like to put on record my thanks to my wife, Sue, and my family, particularly Brianna, who took some time out of studying her medical degree to fly in to help me campaign. My son Mason was whipped into shape by Jon Martlew and he had him out working hard. I also thank my other two children: Shannon, who was overseas, and Jordan, who was in Europe. I appreciate their phone calls and text messages and the support they offered. We all know that we cannot do this job without the support of our families. I appreciate the support that mine gives me to enable me to be their representative in this place.

There are several people who have worked in my office over the period of time that I have been the local member and I would like to thank all of them, in particular Wendy, Donna, Elysia, who is now working with me, but also Austin, Mitch and Kylie who all at different times have played a role in ensuring that the office runs smoothly and that constituents are well represented, listened to and have their concerns heard and acted upon and, where possible, resolved.

Obviously, a campaign needs a lot of volunteers and support. The support that I have in Toowoomba North is very much grassroots support. It is not support from an organised union. We are not bringing people in who pretend they are locals. We have a good, local contingent. I will go through quite a long list of people who I would very much like to thank. If there are any I have omitted I promise that I will give them another opportunity to be mentioned in this place in the future. Unfortunately, this address-in-reply comes so late that Dellys Kelly, who ran my campaign office, has, in fact, passed away. She was a stalwart of the party for generations and an anchor in times when the party had few numbers in this place. Her help, support and guidance over many years was greatly appreciated. I give my condolences to her family. I acknowledge her support here today in running the office, taking the calls and making sure everybody did what they were supposed to do. She was never shy in telling me what I should be doing as well.

I thank those volunteers who looked after the corflutes—we all know that they need to be put together, erected and kept clean—the booth workers and the people who did roadsides for me, particularly Garth and his family; Jon Martlew and his family; Michael Duff and all of his family and other relatives who came in to help; Dave and Pati Nicholls; Gary and Helen Varidel; David and Jane van Gend; Big Jim, who is a country boy at heart who lived in Toowoomba for a number of years and although he is getting old and has a lot of different health issues going on always turns up and works hard and I appreciate his support and help; John Lutvey; Glenis Batten; Neil Munro; the entire Anderson family; Jeff Eacersall and his family; Mike Hogan and all of his boys who helped us with our signage and put a lot of work in; Colin McKay; John Redman; Mike Robinson; John White; John and Kathy Gouldson, and I wish John all the best with his current health challenges and I hope he overcomes those as he has in the past; the Barron family, who helped me out at Fairview Heights, for all the work that they put into that area; to Pen and the crew who look after Rockville for me—it is always a tough booth and I appreciate the work she does there with her friends to make sure that I get a good vote; to Errol and Del Spence; Isaac Moody; Jim Curtis; John McVeigh; Barry O’Sullivan; and Barry Junior. These are all part of the team that means I get to be here and represent the people of Toowoomba North. They all give up their time, they all work hard and I appreciate it. We had a couple of young members—Darcy, Ben, Daniel, Ben Apsey, Matt Costello, Cameron, and Justin—who also put a great deal of time in and I appreciate all the work they have done.

After thanking all those people for working and giving me the opportunity and the privilege to represent the people of Toowoomba, let me talk about some of the things that we would like to see done in Toowoomba North. In fact, I will start with some of the pledges that were put forward by the Labor Party. One of those was that there would be a \$6 million upgrade to the intersection of Ruthven and North streets. This is an intersection where one can wait for four or five changes of lights every morning in multiple directions. It is causing massive congestion. It will be a complicated fix. I ran a petition on it. I ran a campaign on it. It was asked, ‘Why is he doing this? The money is already in the budget. It has already been actioned. We have already started the job. It is in the planning.’ It is 12 months later and there has been zero action. Before the election all we heard was a lot of rhetoric. That seems to be very common for this Labor government. There is a lot of conversation before an election and then a lack of action after an election.

We were told there would be 49 new police officers in the southern region. I look forward to seeing them when they get there. I will welcome them onto my patch. I know the people of Townsville, the people of the Gold Coast and many other places are waiting for their promised officers to arrive to drive down crime. Certainly, in my region 49 officers would make a big difference. They were promised before the election and what we have seen subsequent to the election is zero activity in that area from the Labor government.

We also were promised a police station at Highfields. After finding that the land that was purchased by the Labor government some 11 years ago is now prone to flooding, absolutely no activity has happened. We have spent a couple of hundred thousand dollars and achieved nothing but now are going to relocate that station to another block of land. I look forward to that station opening. Again, it was much lauded during the campaign via social media videos. There has been an allocation of \$100,000 which, let us face it, is really not even going to get a tin shed on the block of land. I hope there is some money put behind that by this government because the people of Toowoomba North deserve that.

We are in the same situation in relation to a new town police beat. It has been a year. Recently the minister said that it will go ahead. We heard that a year ago and six months before that in the lead-up to the election. People said it was the LNP that closed the police beat. That is true. When Tommy retired we did close the police beat because it was in his house and he wanted to sell his house and move to the coast. I think Tommy, after his years of loyal service to the Queensland Police Service, was entitled to do that. The budget was never taken away. The budget has been there for four years under the Labor government and yet we see no action on the police beat. Although it was very visible in the campaign prior to the election, we have seen nothing happen after the election.

Those are some of the things that the Labor Party said it would do and that it clearly, as yet, has not done. It has been a year. We are a third of the way into the term so one would expect at least a third of the job to be done. If we use the police station as an example, there was a pledge of \$2.8 million or thereabouts and a bit over \$170,000 has been spent, so we are a long way off a third of the job being done.

What have we seen done in the electorate since I have been the local member? All of the flood works through the centre of town are basically now complete. Whilst this will never flood proof the CBD, it certainly reduces the risk to life and the risk to property. It has been a good investment. On 17 December 2014 a PDA was put through in relation to the centre of town. It has a goods shed on it.

This was a great opportunity for some economic activity and redevelopment of the inner city. Unfortunately, under this government not a great deal has happened since then. I did manage to get all of that land turned over to the local council so we have that opportunity going into the future.

The Victoria Street Bridge was built by the LNP government and is used every day by thousands of people to get to and from the CBD. It has been a good congestion-busting piece of infrastructure. Thanks must go to the Royalties for the Regions program and the LNP government for delivering that.

I was told by many people that a high school at Highfields would not be necessary, but the school is basically full. It has been expanded. I appreciate the government's commitment to the ongoing development of that high school. Its first group of seniors is coming through, which is a fantastic achievement and makes Highfields a much stronger community. I had campaigned very hard for a school hall at Wilsonton State High School.

Mr Perrett: Very hard.

Mr WATTS: I take the interjection from the member for Gympie. I campaigned very hard for that hall and I appreciate the support that was given. The community desperately needed that facility to complete the school. It is a hardworking school. Many of the school's students who end up going to university will be the first in their families to do so. Those students deserve the same facilities as everybody else. I am very proud to have been their strong local voice in this place and to have fought to get that project delivered on their behalf.

There are other projects I could mention such as rail tunnel projects that were delayed and had their budget cuts. I see opposite the member who had something to do with holding up those things for a period. They are now finally underway after about a four-year delay.

I want to talk about the second range crossing, which will be a great piece of infrastructure, funded by the LNP government at both state and federal levels. When Labor came to power there was really just one job left to do, which was to sign a contract. That was really all they had to do. Obviously, that contract has been delayed and pushed back. I am told that it is supposed to open on 2 December, which I think is the final push-back date. The contract delay has meant that there have been many failures on the site, many of which I have spoken about in this place. Certainly safety issues became a concern. I appreciate that a couple of ministers came up and dealt with some of those safety issues, 10 months after I raised them here. However, there are other things that people should be aware of.

I am told that just about all of the cross drains on the second range crossing are currently imploding because the original engineering works did not make them strong enough. They are going to have to be sleeved inside to stop them collapsing, which will reduce the drainage flow and ultimately may lead to some long-term problems. I am told that the compacting and settling has not been done particularly well on various parts of the range and, again, that will become an ongoing maintenance issue.

One issue that should be of great concern to people is that some of the cheapest and skimpiest revegetation around has been used on the second range crossing, after we did such a good job with the existing range crossing and its revegetation. Not only is it skimpy, fouling and not really revegetating particularly well; I am also told that grader grass is present. Grader grass is a weed that will destroy paddocks and has a poor protein count. It is not all over inland Queensland yet, but once you start spraying it on the embankments of a 41-kilometre piece of infrastructure from which trucks go to all parts of Australia and Queensland, I am very concerned that it will spread to other areas and cause great problems for some of our rural communities, their productivity and profitability. I do not know what the minister is doing about that, but I urge him to act quickly to kill the grass before the seeds get into the watercourses and cause ongoing problems.

Historical coins have been found on the range crossing, which we would like to see displayed in Toowoomba. It was one of the biggest ever finds of historical coins in Australia. I have asked the question, but still we do not see anything happening there.

The major problem is that the range crossing will not be opened on time. The people of my electorate and surrounding electorates will be disadvantaged because of the incompetence of this government in the administration of the contract. By 2 December, parts of the road will be opened so that an insurance claim can be made for poor engineering and they can then start working to try to fix it. I do not know if it will be three, five or six months from now—who knows how many months it will be, as everybody has a different story—before we finally see the road opened. They had one job, to sign a competent contract and enforce it, but we have found nothing but disaster all the way along the range crossing.

The toll is another issue. We know that the business case said that there will be a toll. People deserve to know what that toll will be, so that they can get on with planning for their businesses. There will be many opportunities for people to save on logistics costs by using the range crossing, but to be

able to plan, organise and sign contracts they need to know how much the toll will be. It is not complicated. The minister should be able to do the maths. I can help him if he struggles. I am happy to refer back to the original business case. Let us know the cost of the toll, so that people can start planning for their businesses.

I would like to mention my political opponents in the last election, Kerry Shine and Paul Wilson. Both men have a passion for the electorate. We all ran good campaigns. I look forward to being able to represent all of the people of my electorate.

Going forward, there are some things that we would like to see happen. We would like to see mountain bike tracks and walking tracks on the range crossing. We would like to see in Toowoomba a public transport service where we can use go cards; where the buses are regular; where buses do not have to drive past at 60 and 80 kilometres an hour without stopping to pick up people as they have to maintain the ridiculous timetables that they have been given. We have an opportunity to build a motor sports precinct to the west of us and I think that needs to be looked at. I refer again to the parklands PDA in the centre of town. That is a wonderful opportunity, but with lack of government interest and the local government the project is just not being moved forward. It has been four years and the project is not moving forward.

Going forward within the electorate, we need many things. One of those things, which I spoke about in the campaign, is to make sure that to the north of the electorate we have a road adjoining Boundary Street, so that people can skip around the New England Highway. Again I call on the minister to take a serious look at funding that project. We need to have a plan in place to protect the corridor before people build on it and before it is developed. We need a long-term plan going forward. Going forward in the electorate, there are plenty of opportunities for development in the inner city, for our road network to be improved, for the enhancement of the inland rail route and to ensure that the Second Range Crossing is not only finished but also done properly.

(Time expired)