




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 13 June 2019

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.47 pm): It is great to be here to talk about my electorate and the budget but, unfortunately, I do not have good news for the electorate. This budget delivers higher taxes, more debt, fewer jobs and less infrastructure. That will particularly hurt in my electorate of Toowoomba North, for which I work and which I represent in this place. I am their strong local voice, making sure that the things we should have in our region are delivered.

Queensland does not deserve the debt forecast of \$90 billion. It is intergenerational theft. The people who will pay this will be the children, the nieces and nephews and the grandchildren of the people in this place. They will have to repay the money that is spent today just trying to keep the wheels turning because Labor cannot live within its means, because Labor wastes money at every opportunity.

We have seen it all before. We have seen the waste and the debt go up, and that theft is off our children and grandchildren. Labor should be ashamed of itself and our Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk, should be ashamed of stealing that money off future generations.

Business confidence has slumped under the Palaszczuk Labor government for the fourth consecutive quarter. It is rated the least popular government amongst small and medium sized businesses, and in Toowoomba we are now starting to see a jobs crisis. The unemployment rate in Newtown is now at 10.4 per cent, in North Toowoomba and Harlaxton it is at 11.9 per cent and in Wilsonton it is at 10.5 per cent. Interestingly enough, these are the areas that support a Labor government. What people who live in these areas want are jobs, yet they are not seeing it from the government that they have supported. I urge them at the next election to consider their job prospects under a Labor government, and people know what I know—that you cannot afford to trust Labor. You just cannot afford it.

Labor has no vision for Toowoomba, and the lack of new investment in our region in the 2019-20 budget is proof. Toowoomba is the largest inland city in Australia and it makes an economic contribution to Queensland's economy, and that is why a strong plan to elevate our natural assets, accelerate the development of our infrastructure priorities and support local tourism and industry diversification is critical. Unfortunately, we do not see a lot of help from the Labor government. Toowoomba needs strong leadership here in Brisbane to realise our region's potential and invest in game-changing projects like the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing. It took an LNP state and federal government to get this job done. The only thing Labor has managed to contribute is a delay in delivery and a lack of information about how much businesses will have to pay. Inland rail is the next project. I urge the minister to get on with the intergovernmental agreement so that we can get the wheels turning again in Toowoomba. Toowoomba is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland and it is only fair we receive our fair share of funding for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs.

Mr Power: Like the police facility at Highfields?

Mr WATTS: I will come to the police facility, and I thank the member for Logan for bringing it up. The community and I have worked very hard to get two police facilities in the electorate at Newtown and Highfields, and these are good announcements. The members of the community who worked hard along with me and attended various forums to fight for this are glad that their voices have been heard in this place and that this will be delivered for them.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Mr WATTS: Absolutely! I made the commitment to the electorate that I would fight for them and get these projects delivered, and in this budget we see them delivered.

The students who study at Toowoomba State High School at Mount Lofty and the students who study at Toowoomba East State School will also be pleased, because after being neglected we have been working very hard to ensure that those schools get the maintenance and improvement budget allocated to them that they deserve. Again, their voices have been heard in this place and I do thank the minister for upgrading those facilities for my community and my community will thank the government for it as well. The North and Ruthven Street upgrade is something about which I have lodged a petition in this place and spoken about countless times in adjournment debates. It was promised on the never-never for so long by this Labor government. Finally we see that the government has been shamed into delivering the money in this budget for an upgrade that was needed five years ago and is still only just about to get underway.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: We need to consider what our community will look like in the next 10 to 20 years. Who will be living in Toowoomba, what will they be doing and what are the things and infrastructure they will need? I believe firmly in supporting the Olympic bid because we believe that will help deliver the infrastructure, particularly the transport infrastructure, that we need to make sure—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr WATTS: Member for Logan, I will be here when you speak, so be ready, because all you have to talk about is a debt bomb—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! Order!

Mr WATTS:—something that you will be proud of—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WATTS:—delivering a debt bomb to the children of Queensland!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You will resume your seat. When I call for order, that is the expectation. If I stand to my feet, everyone stops and you resume your seat. Member for Logan, your interjections were not being taken. You are now warned under the standing orders. Member for Toowoomba North, you will direct your comments through the chair.

Ms PEASE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order is that the member's behaviour was completely unparliamentary and outrageous and I would ask you to counsel him on that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, thank you. I am quite capable of doing this job. I have done that already and directed the member for Toowoomba North to follow the directions of the person in the Speaker's chair.

Mr WATTS: In the future in Toowoomba I look forward to seeing investment in new technology, infrastructure and services such as inland rail with fast passenger rail to Brisbane, telecommunications, roads and a hospital that needs funding and not just another plan, but, finally, we do see that the money is going to be expended this year on the plan that was promised last year. I also look forward to seeing a mountain bike track and walking tracks, public transport and green space. This is the future for Toowoomba North. These are the things that we would like to see.

There are a couple of projects that have been left out of the budget. One of those is funding for a parking master plan at Fairview Heights State School. I would urge the education minister to consider this request again. There are many signatures on the petition and we would really like to have a master plan because we do not want to see children getting hit by cars out the front of the school, which has unfortunately already happened in my electorate. The Boundary Street connection road to Highfields is a critical piece of future infrastructure that will allow Highfields to continue to grow and will connect the residents of Highfields to jobs at both Wilsonton industrial estate and other areas in Toowoomba. It is important that we ensure that we have a plan for this road and identify a path and we preserve that path to make sure that it is not built on. Again, I urge the minister to consider putting that in a future plan.

There is lots of talk in Toowoomba about a raceway and entertainment precinct near the airport in Pat Weir's electorate, and this is something that needs to be seriously considered and something that I have advocated for previously. It will be a great tourism drawcard for our region and it will be a great opportunity for the people of Queensland to enjoy more motor racing sport in our region, something that I know they are very passionate about, and even bring some extra major events.


The Quarry Gardens is another area that just needs to be got on with. We just need to stop the planning and need to invest some money to ensure this tourist attraction gets developed. The railway precinct—a priority development area that Jeff Seeney designated—has basically sat stagnant under this Labor government through complete lack of investment in developing that parkland. Yes, we have seen some opportunities to do up the Goods Shed, but the parkland needs to be developed to unleash the private businesses that adjoin that parkland and encourage them to build and develop opportunities for jobs in Toowoomba.

Those are the things that are going on in my electorate, but I will come back to some of the statewide issues. One of the things that we have spoken about is this debt bomb for future generations and the complete lack of transparency in suggesting that the government will bring this debt bomb forward and ensure that the people of Queensland understand that they are going to be saddled with this debt for infrastructure. The budget papers show that to not be true.

The other issue that I want to talk about is my shadow portfolio of the police. Over a period of time the Police budget is reducing as a percentage of the overall budget. If we take the average that we spent on police whilst in government and we take the average being spent by Labor whilst in government, as part of the overall budget we see that the police are missing a \$1.173 billion budget underspend over five years. If we want to know why crime is up, it is because there is less money being allocated in the budget.

We have heard people speak about the priorities of government. Clearly the priority of the Labor government is not to keep the people of Queensland safe because it does not prioritise the Police budget as a percentage of the overall budget, so we will see less money in the budget and we will see more crime under this Labor government. There is \$234 million per year missing out of the Police budget under the Labor government over the last five years and the result of that can be seen in many areas, including the 24-hour station at Kirwan closing down because there were not enough police to man it—an unprecedented event.

We have seen that police resources are being drained into watch houses and that police are having to babysit children who should fall under another department's responsibility, but that budget is being tapped into by those other departments and is squeezing the police's ability to deal with crime on our streets when it should not be. Not only is the budget being underfunded as a percentage of the overall budget; it is also squeezing various parts of the budget by making the police do jobs that are not truly their responsibility.

 **Mr WATTS** (2.11 pm), continuing: What is clear from this budget is that one cannot afford to trust Labor. In Toowoomba North we have the beginnings of a jobs crisis. In Newtown we see 10.4 per cent unemployment, in North Toowoomba and Harlaxton we see 11.9 per cent unemployment and in Wilsonton we see 10.5 per cent unemployment. That is not good enough. We do not want the jobs in our region to be threatened. This new royalty tax on the gas industry will hit jobs hard in our region at a time when unemployment is growing. The approval for the New Acland mine will ensure that 150 people will not lose their jobs. I urge the minister to take a serious look at that.

What do we know about Labor's form? We know that they will bring in higher taxes. We know that they will give us more debt. We know that there will be fewer jobs and we know from this budget that there will be less infrastructure. Labor's incompetence and waste has not come cheap for the people of Queensland. Locally, I have always said that I will fight for the people of Toowoomba. I will be their strong local voice delivering for our region by coming to this place and demanding we get our fair share so I am pleased that my election commitment to get the Highfields Police Station and the Newtown police hub is delivered by this budget.

After doing a petition and working hard with the community to put the North and Ruthven streets junction upgrade on the agenda, I am pleased that there is money in this budget for that. I am very pleased that in its centenary year Toowoomba State High School will receive funding to bring its campus up to speed with Highfields State Secondary College and Wilsonton State High School, two schools that have seen great funding come in in my time as a member.

I go back to where I began: one cannot afford to trust Labor. Its incompetence and waste is not cheap for the people of Queensland. A \$90 billion debt bomb has been handed to our children and our grandchildren with no solution on the horizon. Millions of dollars a day in interest payments could

otherwise be going to job-creating infrastructure; millions of dollars a day could be going to hospitals; millions of dollars a day could be going towards improving roads and reducing congestion. These are all things that government has to make a choice about and this government has chosen not to fund them but to build debt.