




Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

Toowoomba North Small Business Advisory Committee; Gas Billing

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.12 pm): I wish to speak a little bit about the Toowoomba North Small Business Advisory Committee. We set this up and it has been a great source of information. I am looking forward to the final meeting this year. I get great advice from the small businesses in the electorate of Toowoomba North, and what they are telling me is that they are doing it tough. The combination of drought, the end of a major construction project—the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing—and no inland rail on the agenda is hurting lots of small businesses in our electorate. I have managed and owned my own small business, so I do understand their situation.

I also want to clarify a couple of things for the House. People often think that Toowoomba is ticking along great, but these are the unemployment rates in certain suburbs of my electorate: Newtown, 9.6 per cent; North Toowoomba-Harlaxton, 11.1 per cent; Toowoomba Central, 7.6 per cent; and Wilsonton, 9.6 per cent. Small business is the biggest employer in the state, but they are doing it tough in Toowoomba. One of the things that concerns me is that the government here thinks that Toowoomba is in fact not regional.

Even though they came to Toowoomba to govern from the regions, the payroll tax discount is not available to Toowoomba because we are not regional. Some of the benefits for apprentices are not available in Toowoomba because we are not regional. You cannot have it both ways. If we are not regional, then why do we only have one electricity supplier: Ergon Electricity. The LNP will change this situation and bring some relief to the small businesses in our area. The payroll tax will cost some Toowoomba businesses up to \$800,000. I call on the Labor Palaszczuk government to decide: is Toowoomba metro, in which case let's get a fast train; or are we regional, in which case let's have the same discounts, privileges and benefits as other regional areas.

The other thing I would like to talk about is gas billing in our area. I would like to place on record my disappointment in the Minister for Energy over his half-hearted response to the gas billing issue that has affected thousands of people in my electorate. These people received bills that were maybe six or seven times above their last bill. This was caused by somebody reading the meters or in fact not reading the meters and just recording numbers. As a result, people had been under-billed a couple of times and then they got a massive bill. A lot of people are pensioners, people who are doing it tough. They are concerned that the companies took the money straight out of their accounts. We worked very hard with the people who have been affected to get a good outcome for them, but it was disappointing to hear the minister's response—

(Time expired)