




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 4 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.43 pm): I rise to address the appropriation bills for the 2020-21 budget. While I will be supporting the bills and welcome the inclusion of some positive measures—like a new school for my electorate—I want to spend a little time on why I feel this budget is a bit disappointing overall.

After listening to members' contributions on this, I am getting the impression that the government is selling this budget on two key grounds: firstly, that we have lower debt than other states; secondly, the handy campaign line, 'There are no new taxes.' This is almost funny, because it quite neatly points to some of the biggest problems with Labor's approach. When they say 'no new taxes', what that really means is no new taxes for their mates in the banking, mining and property industries. When they say 'lower debt than other states', what that translates into is less investment in infrastructure, social services and job-creating projects than the other states.

This budget, like every other budget, is about who gets what. In Queensland, the property developers, big banks and multinational mining corporations get no new taxes, but ordinary people consistently get higher fees for health, transport and education, lower wages, few jobs and growing housing insecurity. The biggest failure of this budget is its failure to tackle the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of those mining corporations, big banks and property developers.

Thermal coal is in decline and Queenslanders are losing royalties revenue. We could do so much more to expand the mining of those minerals we need for a massive renewables expansion and give ordinary people a fair share of the wealth it generates by raising royalties. Instead, Labor has frozen royalties to keep coal and gas on life support. There is no better example of why we need to take on big corporations rather than leaning on ordinary people than the sorry situation with Labor's health promises during this election.

Queensland has done a great job—a world-leading job—in suppressing COVID-19 thanks to our incredible frontline workers, the Chief Health Officer and—I will say it again so there is no confusion—thanks to the government's leadership as well. Unfortunately, Labor is asking health workers to carry this huge load on our behalf while failing to support them. Before the election they froze their wages just as we were tipping into a recession. I was proud to stand here and vote against those measures. Then during the election the government proposed what sounded like a big expansion: thousands of extra frontline workers. In fact, they almost promised as many additional frontline workers as the Greens proposed in health, but then it all came unstuck. As it turns out—and this budget confirms—their promise of 5,800 nurses, 1,500 doctors and 1,700 allied health professional by 2024 is based on no new money. That means that Queensland Health and our hospitals will need to cut \$270 million of healthcare spending from their other work every single year. That is \$1.08 billion over the next four years.

I will be talking to the nurses, midwives and doctors in my electorate and beyond about how these cuts could affect their work. I want to ask the government where exactly they expect that money will come from. They will demand the opposition outline their cuts to reduce debt but dismiss the question themselves with glib promises of so-called efficiency savings. Frontline workers know what that means. Maybe it is fewer hospital parking concessions or less administrative, logistics and policy support—less of what they need to do their jobs. Especially during a pandemic we should be giving them the resources they need, not asking them to do more with less. As my colleague, the member for South Brisbane, said here in Tuesday: Queensland is a wealthy state, but we need to make sure that wealth is shared.

There is a very similar story in education. Yes, they are building new schools across Queensland, and that is very welcome, but instead of taking on big mining corporations and raising the revenue we need, they are asking teachers to also do more with less. In particular, the flagship promise in the budget for 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 teacher aides over the next four years is actually funded from the existing education department budget. That means no new money. This one is truly puzzling, because it is just not clear to me how they are planning to add more than 7,000 extra staff—very welcome extra staff, I should say—without spending any extra money. This is all while Queensland is the worst state or territory in the nation at funding our public schools up to the national benchmark, which is the Schooling Resource Standard, SRS. Instead of getting our public schools to 100 per cent of the SRS by coughing up our state contribution of 80 per cent, Queensland is stuck at 69 per cent with no increase to that proportion over the next three years.

The Greens believe that we should fully fund our public schools, cut class sizes, abolish school fees for state schools and create free breakfast and lunch programs so that no child has to learn on an empty stomach. Once again, unless we make big corporations pay their fair share we will not be able to provide the things every Queenslanders needs to live a good life.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental building blocks of a good life is a safe, secure home, but right now tens of thousands of people in Queensland do not have that. Based on previous growth rates, we can estimate that there are around 47,000 people on the social housing waitlist in Queensland, although I suspect we will find that it is more than that when the register for the last year is finally released. There has never been a better time to invest in social housing. The Victorian government acknowledged that when they announced a social housing stimulus package with their budget. I had hoped to see Queensland Labor do the same and follow suit—but no, there is no new money for social housing in this budget and the government plans to deliver just 470 social homes this year.

Building homes for around two per cent of the current waiting list is so absurd that it almost obscures the gravity of this situation—that there are tens of thousands of real people registered and waiting for a home with no end in sight. In a wealthy state like Queensland, no-one should be without a home, but instead of building more homes they are building more prisons.

As I have said in this place I do not know how many times before, building new prisons will not fix overcrowding and hiring more police will not make anyone safer. To build and operate the new and expanded prisons, the government are planning to spend more money than they will spend on social housing. Yes, to clear this up if the Treasurer is confused, that includes money on prisons—and they are prisons—for children as young as 10 years old. That is on top of their plan to spend \$325 million on extra police.

Keeping people, especially young kids, locked up does not solve the causes of crime, poverty and discrimination. In fact, it traps more kids—disproportionately Indigenous kids—in a cycle of criminalisation. This should be a moment for boldness and to leave the old law-and-order politics behind. As we all saw, the electorate roundly rejected the LNP's shameful and racist policy for a youth curfew in Cairns and Townsville, and their scare campaign did not work. That should be a sign to Labor that things need to change in Queensland. I am reiterating the Greens' call for a moratorium on new prisons, both youth prisons and adult prisons, and for the government to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14. We need to build homes and communities, not prisons.

One thing that is welcome in this budget is the \$500 million for the Renewable Energy Fund via CleanCo as previously announced and the \$145 million for grid upgrades to create three renewable energy zones. However, what is missing is a detailed and comprehensive strategy to build 100 per cent publicly owned clean energy as quickly as possible. I can tell the government one thing: they will not get there by approving new thermal coal and gas projects. Getting to 50 per cent renewables should be easy—and we could even get there with a target but no plan, as we have at the moment—but getting to 100 per cent will need planning, especially to make sure workers with good paying jobs at coal power plants and coal mines in South-East and regional Queensland are not left behind.

Despite countless warnings that thermal coal and gas are in decline, Labor and the LNP cling to these old, polluting industries—no doubt out of a sense of debt or obligation to the corporations funding their campaigns and perhaps out of a misplaced attempt to reconnect with a working class base that

seems to be abandoning them all too quickly. What communities and workers across Queensland really deserve is honesty about the transition ahead—a plan for good steady jobs, affordable housing, free education and health care to support them—but that is not the plan this budget supports. It is more useful to the retirement plans of millionaire bankers and coal CEOs than anything else.

I turn briefly to national parks and protected areas. This budget delivers just \$7.6 million per year, or \$28 million over four years, to expand our national parks and other protected areas, which is well below the \$135 million called for by the Queensland Conservation Council and only around one-10th of the amount called for by other experts. I am referring there to the 2018 Queensland Treasury Corporation report—a report that the government tried to bury—that made clear that capital investment of \$225 million would be required to reach even 13 per cent of Queensland being in protected areas and that this would require \$25 million to \$80 million in annual funding for effective maintenance.

Former environment minister Enoch described the sum that is being committed as an ‘initial’ investment—a down payment. How depressingly disappointing it is to now learn that the plan for the next four years includes no extra money. It is a down payment and no-one is there to pick up the rest of the bill. It looks like we are nowhere near on track to meet the nationally agreed target of 17 per cent for our protected areas here in Queensland. Bold investment to restore and protect biodiversity through expanding protected areas would be a brilliant way to keep people working as we recover from COVID, and it is more vital every year as climate change pushes more species to the brink. I urge the government to increase this commitment.

I was also pleased to hear yesterday that the government will not increase public transport fares in 2021, but I still marvel at the apparently purely ideological attachment to ticketing and fares. The total cost to the state government of delivering public transport in South-East Queensland went up in this budget from \$1.55 billion to \$1.74 billion for the coming year, thanks to a drop in fare revenue due to COVID. Even before fare revenue dropped, the state government was already subsidising about 80 per cent of every single trip, and now that figure would be far higher. That is before we consider the \$371 million Labor are spending on a new privatised ticketing system. Considering both these things, the case is now even stronger for making public transport free, as the Greens proposed before the election. All told, it is actually cheaper for the government to make public transport free. We could save on the cost of ticketing, cut back on wasteful road widening, cut pollution and transform our city in the process.

I am very happy to see that the budget contains \$65 million for a new school in Brisbane’s inner west near my electorate. It is a wonderful feeling to stand here and say that after years of getting up in this place to explain why we need a new school to address overcrowding. The west side is growing rapidly, and we need long-term planning and infrastructure like schools to keep up. One thing I would note immediately is that, while the commitment so far is just for a primary school, there is no denying we also need more secondary capacity. Ensuring that the community is involved in planning and heard in making decisions about the location of this school will be my priority over the next two years and I am looking forward to working with the department to help make this happen.

The other crucial side of school overcrowding is outside school hours care. Right now capacity is not keeping up with demand and too many parents are missing out which affects their ability to work and their families’ financial stability. Despite a pre-election commitment for more OSHC funding at Indooroopilly and Ironside state schools, I could not see this in the budget papers and I will be following this up in estimates this coming week to make sure it is delivered as soon as possible and not delayed.

There are a few other local projects funded in the budget I want to acknowledge here as well. The government has allocated \$500,000 to redesign the Indooroopilly Shopping Centre bus station over the next two years. It will be important to make sure this upgrade improves pedestrian access across Musgrave Road and Station Road. It is great to see the state will also be jointly funding the design of the shared path along Witton Road in Indooroopilly near Ambrose Treacy College. This is a really important stretch to link up the new proposed riverwalk at Indooroopilly and the Centenary cycleway. It is great to see that is moving forward.

I would with more time like to address the failure again of this budget to address train station accessibility, particularly at the Taringa train station which so desperately needs an upgrade. Despite \$244 million in funding for the Centenary Bridge duplication and motorway upgrades, we still see no funding to commit to build priority bus lanes along the motorway. This is despite that being proposed in the Western Brisbane Transport Network Strategy dating all the way back in 2009. I am disappointed to see nothing in the budget for the state to work with the Brisbane City Council to buy back the ABC site in Toowong and to help make those vitally important green bridges in inner Brisbane happen. I will keep making the case for that.

In closing and in general, long-term planning and big, bold ideas for Queensland's post-COVID future are hard to find in this budget. When the government told us there would be no surprises in this budget, they were not lying—but I almost wish they had offered just a few surprises. More of the same means more unemployment, more homelessness, more child poverty and more inequality while the big banks, property developers and mining corporations get more profits and continue to run the show.

This budget really is full of missed opportunities. I will avoid exhaustively recounting the Greens' election platform here again; members can read it all online if they would like some more ideas. Just a few of those proposals—like 100,000 public homes, free school meals, 100 per cent publicly owned clean energy, a local manufacturing revival and free public transport—would have transformed everyday Queenslanders' lives for the better. To do that, this budget would have had to take on the big banks and mining corporations that run the state. Unfortunately, this budget reads more like a repayment of their investment in Labor this election than a budget for Queenslanders who are really struggling.