




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 4 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise to speak on the appropriation bills for 2020-21. What do we have in this budget? A budget is all about showing a government's priorities: what things it thinks are important, what it thinks should happen and how it should operate and present itself to the people of Queensland. What do we see? We see debt, we see deficit and we see deceit. We are pretty clear as to what Labor thinks. They have deceived the electorate by going to the election without clearly articulating that they plan on borrowing an extra \$28 billion, taking the debt to a whopping \$130 billion. By anybody's measure, that is a lot of money.

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr WATTS: I hear the roads minister interjecting. I will throw a challenge out for him. Minister, if we took \$28 billion worth of \$100 notes and we laid them end to end, do you think we would be able to go all the way along your entire state road network?

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr WATTS: That's correct.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Walker): Direct your comments through the chair, please.

Mr WATTS: There would be over 33,000 kilometres of \$100 bills. In fact, there would be 44,240 kilometres of \$100 bills. The people of Queensland deserve to know how much \$28 billion is.

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr WATTS: If the minister would pipe down for just one second, he would see that 44,000 kilometres is a long way to lay down \$100 bills. I would enjoy the walk with him. If we laid down one bill every 10 seconds it would take us 88 years to get to the \$28 billion of taxpayers' money that is about to be spent. That will give members some concept of how much \$28 billion is. I have a couple of other analogies to help people visualise. If we stacked the \$100 bills one on top of the other, we would be able to step off and walk onto the Space Station. That is how much \$28 billion is. That is the deceit of this government. They have borrowed that much money.

The government has made some heroic assumptions. People make heroic assumptions every week. Some people fill out lotto forms and take a punt on some numbers. They make an historic assumption that they might win and they speculate what they would do with the million dollars if they won. Let me tell members: this government needs to win lotto five times a week for 107 years to get to the \$28 billion that it is going to borrow. Now we understand the deceit that was put on the electorate of Queensland. Nobody was imagining a 44,000-kilometre line of \$100 bills. Nobody was imagining that the amount of money that is about to be borrowed is so large.

If we were borrowing it for something useful, that would be fantastic. I have been in business and I know that one borrows money to buy assets. One gets those assets and looks at them. I want to run through a couple of other numbers. Let us assume that we have a house and our house is worth \$191,539. Our mortgage is \$102,000 and we earn \$56,700 a year. Unfortunately, we spend \$64,670 a year. So what do we need to do? We need to reach into the mortgage. We go to the bank and say, 'Excuse me, would you lend us \$28,000 so that we can do some things on our house? Promise we will spend it on the renovations and some capital and everything else. Just trust us.' In four years time the bank comes back and says, 'Let's have a look at how much we valued the house at.' The house value has gone up \$145. The mortgage has gone up by \$28,000.

All we need to do to understand what they have just done in Queensland is add a lot of zeros because the numbers are identical. If this were an individual household they would not go and draw out \$28,000 and spend none of it on improving the asset. The asset has gone up by \$145 after they took out \$28,000. It does not seem like enough to justify the spending of the money.

There we have it. That is debt and deficit. Obviously we are losing money every year running that deficit, trying to buy fuel for the cars and buying pens to keep on people's desks. We are not building assets. There is some asset building going on. If there were a lot it would go up a lot more. The net worth of Queensland does not go up. It is a complete fraud on people.

What it really is is intergenerational theft. We are stealing this money from future generations because they are the ones who are going to have to pay it back. Why are we stealing that money? Why is this Labor government stealing that money from future generations? It is because they are going to waste it and because they are incompetent. If they were competent we would see the asset price go up. We would see things expand. Even with their own projections we do not see a great improvement in unemployment. We do not see a great improvement in the asset. What we do see is a great improvement in the debt. That is what we see from this government.

They have made some heroic assumptions. They have deceived the electorate. They are running a deficit. They are racking up debt. They are committing intergeneration theft. Unemployment does not get any better. Our assets do not really grow. Now we are all clear about what Labor's priorities are for the budget.

There are a couple of things they could do for my electorate that would be very useful. I will outline those. One of those, which is not quite in my electorate but people who would be directly affected live in my electorate, would be to approve Acland. Some 500 families would have an income and job this side of Christmas if they did. There is no reason it cannot be approved. The court action and everything else is just a furphy. They are just hiding. Other mine sites that face more hurdles and more court action have been approved by this government. They are misleading people. They are hiding because they do not want the Acland coalmine to go ahead, and that is the reality of it.

That is costing jobs in my electorate where we have 27.2 per cent youth unemployment. There are opportunities for apprentices—apprentice diesel fitters—and for people to learn how to become coalminers, and none of that is possible. There are jobs to herd cattle and to do some of the greatest rehabilitation that is available in this state. That is what Acland would do, but they will not approve it. Some 500 people are going to have a lot fewer presents under the Christmas tree this year because the government is being stubborn because they need inner-city Greens preferences.

There are a couple of good things. I want to give credit where it is deserved. As members of this House will know, Wilsonton State School is a school that I have a great relationship with and work very hard with. One of the things that is desperately needed there is an arts and performance centre. They need to upgrade their senior classrooms because they do not have the classrooms to teach right through to year 12. They need to get the hospitality area up to speed. All of that has been funded in this budget. It was a bipartisan commitment. Both sides were committed to it. That is fantastic for the school.

There is one little thing that I would like the minister to consider in addition. That is to look at a scramble crossing out the front. As the campus has gone from a few hundred kids to just under 1,000, the corner gets very crowded with students trying to cross all the way. They get stuck on one corner. It would be really useful if there was a scramble crossing there. I am sure the minister will look at that as these renovations go on.

For Toowoomba West Special School there is \$3.1 million. That is great for the kids at Toowoomba West Special School. It is half of what is required for the campus upgrade based on its plan, but it is a start. Out at Highfields State School there is \$3 million for the administration centre. That is a good thing because administrators have been sitting in corridors for a long time. I am glad to see that.

I will turn to missed opportunities. The Toowoomba North State School has grown. We have a large Yazidi community in Toowoomba and many of their children are attending Toowoomba North State School so it is growing very fast. They cannot fit in the school's library for assembly. They have nowhere to gather as a whole school without sitting on each other's laps. There is a roofed area but it is not enclosed. I think that the minister should really have a look at that area and enclose it so the school can gather together for assembly.

We have heard a lot about hospitals and satellite hospitals and all those different things. In Toowoomba there are people who get given a \$1,000 cab ride to Brisbane because our hardworking doctors and nurses are over capacity by heaps. They have to come to Brisbane. If we do not address the hospital situation in Toowoomba we are going to see tragedies. We made a commitment for a day surgery which would have taken some pressure off. In the budget there is some money for a patch up and a bit of maintenance at the existing hospital and for the business case to be finalised. We know what is needed. We need a new hospital at Baillie Henderson. We are going to have to bite the bullet as a state and get on with building or people are going to lose their lives and/or we are going to waste a heap more money moving people up and down the range in ambulances and taxis so they can see doctors. That is not fair.

One of the single biggest problems facing my electorate is water security. We live on top of a hill. There is no doubt that we need to do a water security options assessment of all of the possible options that can supply water to Toowoomba over the next 30 years. That needs to be done. That needs to be funded. Once that is done we need to then pick the best options that will deliver a secure water supply over a period of time.

The other thing that has been very popular in the electorate and that people really desire is a second connection road because the New England Highway is getting completely clogged with traffic from Highfields to town every day. This road, which I would like to call a western distributor road, could go all the way from Highfields through to Westbrook, but there is a piece in the middle that needs to be joined up and expanded. At the very least, we should do the business case for that so that we can plan, purchase the corridor and protect it for the future. If we do not do that soon we are not going to be able to ever do it because people will subdivide and build on that land. We need to plan, purchase that corridor and protect that corridor to secure Toowoomba's traffic flow long into the future on the western side of town.

There are another couple of missed opportunities. We do not have electricity competition in Toowoomba. People here in Brisbane enjoy 26-odd different companies that can supply power. They can negotiate the price. We have no choice: we have a monopoly in Toowoomba. You are stuck with the price. No matter how much you use you have to pay the bill they send.

The other thing that needs to be seriously considered by this government now that it has been given a four-year term is that, with Toowoomba's youth unemployment at 27.2 per cent, why are we included in the south-east corner when it comes to payroll tax? We are not considered regional or rural for payroll tax exemption, but we should be because it affects all of our businesses. It drives businesses out of Toowoomba. They are looking to move to other places. That is not good for us locally.

We can safely say that there have been a couple of educational projects in the budget that I would definitely support. There are some missed opportunities. But more than all of that, the people of Queensland should know that they have been deceived by this government. They should know that this government has embarked on intergenerational theft. They are taking our children and grandchildren's tax dollars and spending them right now.

If they were creating jobs by building assets and giving us a future, that would be a good thing. Unfortunately, if the net worth of Queensland is not going up by very much at all then that is not the case. They are just feeding the debt monster that they have created over the last 25-odd years. The debt monster is getting bigger and harder to control. The people of Queensland should be concerned that they were deceived and that the debt is so large.

(Time expired)