



Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill

Transport and Resources Committee, Report

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.08 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the Transport and Resources Committee report on the budget. Before I get into that, we need to ask ourselves why do we have a budget and why do we have elections. The answer to both of those questions is to make sure that when we tax people their money is spent appropriately, wisely and in the way that the government outlined that it would spend. I am concerned that going into the election people were informed of a \$4 billion potential blowout that would be required to get us through COVID but then after the election—strangely enough, just a few weeks after the election—the budget papers were prepared and the people of Queensland, bearing in mind that we now have a four-year fixed term, were told, ‘We have made a terrible mistake. It is not \$4 billion; it is actually \$28 billion.’

That is not very transparent, and it is a complete manipulation of our processes to ensure we get good governance of the state and good stewardship of taxpayers’ dollars. I think the Queensland public would be rightly feeling that they have been duped, because they thought they were voting for \$4 billion worth of debt but they got \$28 billion worth of debt. Some of the people who will have to pay that debt back were not able to vote because they were too young, but when the time comes it will be their tax dollars that will be used to pay the debt back. Even more concerning for someone who is 17 and out there chasing their first job while trying to work out how they are going to earn the tax to pay that money back is that, as we read in the budget papers, the outline in the forward estimates confirms that Queensland will have the worst unemployment figures in the country. That is not very reassuring for people who were misled in the lead-up to the election over the \$28 billion debt.

Where is this \$28 billion going? The purpose of the budget is to explore where this money is going. What we found out is that, unlike other states, it is not going towards infrastructure. A lot of this budget is just going to keep the lights on for Queensland and to make sure government can keep on functioning. We find ourselves in a situation where we are living beyond our means. It is now intergenerational theft because the next generation is going to have to pay for the things that have been consumed as a result of the mismanagement of this government in the current term.

I also want to talk about the fundamentals of our budget system. Why do we have a budget? Why do we go through estimates and what is its purpose? We have heard all of the statistics. You got 180 questions; we had 51 per cent and 42 per cent. These numbers all sound great. The reality is that, as everyone can see, if you get questions on notice just a few hours before that is not particularly helpful.

That is what happened on this occasion, and it is incredibly disappointing in relation to the transparency of taxpayers' dollars. More than that, we found a whole bunch of filibustering and defence coming from the people who should be accountable to the people whose money they are spending.

The job of opposition—of everyone in this parliament—is to hold the executive to account for how it spends money. Sitting on the committee are backbenchers from all sides of the aisles who should be rightly concerned when questions are not being answered succinctly and properly and people are just trying to burn time, because the people who are being misled, the people who are being disappointed and the people who are being let down are the Queensland taxpayers, who fund everything—everything—that this government does.

Everything that this executive does is funded by taxpayers in Queensland. This was an opportunity to bring some transparency, to build some trust, to show some integrity and tell people what is actually going on. What did we find? We found a whole bunch of smoke and mirrors. We found a whole bunch of filibustering. We found no transparency. We found that the government is afraid of the people of Queensland finding out what is going on with this executive. That is what we found and that is what this process was about—making sure they could ensure the people of Queensland do not know how this government is spending their money so badly.