




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.14 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the address-in-reply. First, let me say that representing and serving the constituents of any electorate is indeed a privilege and it is a humbling experience to be voted in again, particularly with an increase in the primary vote. I thank the people of Toowoomba North for their confidence in me to be their strong local voice in this place. I look forward to well and truly serving them.

As the elected member, I would also like to pledge my allegiance to Her Majesty The Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, and I wish her well in recovering from her sprained back. To her representative now in Queensland, Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland, I also wish her well in her appointment. To the former governor I would like to say thank you very much for your service. I am sorry I did not get an opportunity to thank you while you were still in office, but here we are.

First and foremost, I would like to very much thank the people of Toowoomba North. We have been on a journey together, and we have seen some significant improvements in the electorate in the time I have been here. There are two previous members, both Graham Healy and Kerry Shine, who also well and truly served the people of Toowoomba North, and I thank them for their service. Kerry is now on the council, and I certainly respect a life well spent in service to the people of my community.

I would also like to thank the leadership team that took us to the last election, both the member for Nanango and the member for Everton. It was a very difficult time for an election. It was very difficult to have any conversation about the future of Queensland when people were really quite fearful about the direction we were heading. We know that this government spent a fair chunk of taxpayers' money researching that. We know that even against the recommendations of the Fitzgerald inquiry they spent millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars ramming home their election message. I do not want to sound cynical about that, but it was interesting to me that the advertising budget wound up shortly after the election whilst the pandemic is still ongoing. Some might say that had an effect on the outcome. We will never know if 9½ or more million taxpayers' dollars for research helped shape the outcome of the election. We have to assume it was all fought fairly.

I would also like to thank my opponents who ran in the election. Unfortunately, unlike the elections I have had against Kerry, which were hard fought on the ground and, in my opinion, very fair but certainly hard fought, this one was a little bit of a bitter campaign. There were some things said. I had signs suggesting that I was a bigot. It is always interesting to me that people think someone who has a different opinion is a bigot, when of course the person with the spray can in their hand is in fact demonstrating their own bigotry by spraying that. I appreciate the apology that Councillor Megan O'Hara Sullivan made to one of my friends for comments that were made during the election. I can only assume that because they were a year later there was an exchange of letters going on, but the withdrawal all the same is appreciated. Let's hope that in future Toowoomba does not see that kind of election and that we see an election fought on ideas and the needs of our community and the desires of the people who live there, because the job that you have when you come into this place is to serve and represent the people.

In particular I would like to thank my campaign manager, Kurt, and Rob. They did a sterling job. Kurt took two months off work completely unpaid to come and do that role, and I will never be able to thank him enough. Rob's analysis was fantastic.

I have too many volunteers to mention but I do thank them all sincerely. We had three pre-poll booths that could not be manned without so many volunteers coming forward so I really do appreciate them. To my office staff at that time—Elysia, Katie and Hayley—I thank you so much for the hard work you put in. I wish both Elysia and Katie well with their careers as they go forward.

I would like to congratulate our new leadership team—the two Davids. In difficult times, we are marching forward well in representing the people of Queensland and bringing ideas to the table so we can all work together to make Queensland a better place. That is the objective of this House—to well and truly serve the people and make Queensland a better place for their lives, their families and their futures.

I would like to thank my wife, Sue, and my children. It was interesting that, because of some of the restrictions of interstate travel, this was the first time I did not have the majority of my children—who are all now young adults—there to help me. That pleased them greatly because, unlike when they were younger and they wanted to put the T-shirts on and wave the banners, they are shyly retiring to the background now and are less enthusiastic about standing on street corners with me. I thank my wife and many of her friends who came forward to help.

I turn now to the electorate. There are several parts of the Toowoomba North electorate that have needed things over a number of years. We have got the Second Range Crossing done. That was set up and funded by our side of the House and the federal government. It was good to see it completed, but the job is far from over. In my maiden speech, I listed some bold dreams, even though people told me not to. I said—

As I start my time of service to the people of Toowoomba, I dream of a time of fast commuter trains—

I see the minister here in the House. I still dream of that fast commuter train, even if it is only to Helidon to start with. I think the people of Toowoomba and the south-east corner would benefit from having the land opened up on the Downs by having a commuter train. I also dreamt of 'double-stacked container trains'. That project is underway, albeit it is going at the speed of a snail. We are now seeing some progress with inland rail and its journey. I said—

I dream of an airport that can land commercial jets—

The Wagner family should be thanked for making that a reality in my first term. At the time I said those words, nobody imagined that would be possible. I said that I dreamt of 'an inland port at Charlton Wellcamp'. We see that, and the government has invested money in that Charlton Wellcamp area to help us export and import products, so that is a good thing. I continued—

I dream of a thriving, revitalised CBD, a university that leads the world in speciality areas of research—

The USQ is leading the world in some of the space research and agricultural research. Unfortunately, in terms of the CBD revitalisation, the rail yards have now been sitting there for a number of years and they could do with some funding to kick that project along to see our CBD revitalised.

I said that I dreamt of 'an entertainment centre ... and a stadium'. Everybody laughed. When we finally get around to building the hospital—and I look forward to the cabinet of the Palaszczuk government funding that hospital, as they should, because it is desperately needed—we will have a vacant block of land in the centre of town. There is a great opportunity with the Olympics coming to look at an entertainment centre and a suitable stadium that is close to the CBD—in fact, walking distance to the CBD. It would have the potential for good public transport using the current heavy rail, which will be less required when inland rail is there. It is a massive block of land and it is a great opportunity to really shape the future of Toowoomba. I encourage the government to talk to me or my community about that and progress some of those things forward.

Wilsonton State School was an election commitment of both sides, and I would like to thank the minister for following through on that. There are certainly a great deal of things that the secondary school needed, and the arts block and the theatre space are most welcome. The upgrade to make the technical facilities competitive with all the other schools in Toowoomba is also a great thing. That is fantastic, but there is a massive problem out the front. I ask the government and the minister again to have a look at what we can do about a scramble crossing so that the thousand kids can get across that one junction more effectively, rather than them piling up on the corner where there is not enough room for them to stand. I look forward to that discussion.

Unfortunately, only one side of politics promised a road that would run from the back of Highfields through to Westbrook. There is a corridor there that currently exists that needs to be protected for the future. I encourage the government to look at an investigation into that. Even if they cannot fund the road, they should investigate it and protect the corridor for the future so that when the money is available

we will have an opportunity for that second road that would connect Highfields to the bypass and to the industrial estate of Wilsonton. That would mean the New England Highway would not become completely jammed with traffic every morning. Even if it cannot be funded, let us get the investigation done, let us understand what is needed and let us protect the corridor because that is what the people of Toowoomba North and Highfields are really looking for. It will make an enormous difference to the community in the long term. As that corridor gets built out, it will get harder and harder to achieve.

Toowoomba North State School are still waiting for their BER hall. This is one of my hardworking schools. They have a big Ezidi community and a big First Nations community. They do not have an enclosed space that is big enough for them. If anybody wants to visit Toowoomba in August and decide whether or not they deserve an enclosed space for their school assemblies, I would encourage them to do so. After one visit, the funding would materialise because it is not a pleasant place to be sitting when the August winds are blowing through. I would like to see the Toowoomba North State School hall be enclosed. It was built in such a way that it can be enclosed and I would like to see that happen.

One of the single biggest things that needs to happen in Toowoomba is the hospital. The planning has been done and the schematics are done. All of the information is in. I urge the minister to put a funding proposal forward or look at a PPP proposal. There are many ways to fund this hospital. Money is still relatively cheap at the moment, although it would appear worldwide it may be getting a little more expensive. It is time now for this hospital to get seriously underway.

I thank the government. Both parties committed to a \$42 million day surgery. That day surgery is well and truly due. I would love to see the construction get underway. I know it is in process, but given where we are at in Toowoomba—with the pressure on one of the hardest working hospitals where the staff do a fantastic job but the built environment is no longer capable of dealing with the demands they have on them—it is time to make the commitment to increase that built environment. The day surgery buys us a little bit of time, but it is going to take some time to build this facility. I encourage the government, the minister and the cabinet to seriously look at funding that hospital and getting that project underway.

We need additional ICU beds. We need to reduce our ambulance ramping. At the moment, we are spending \$7½ million on the travel subsidy. I would like to see those specialists and those services offered in my community. A neurosurgeon would be very useful. We would have fewer helicopter rides for people who are suffering a swelling on the brain and/or losing their life because time is of the essence when they have such an injury. The hospital is a serious thing that needs to be looked at, and I encourage the government to do that.

Crime is unfortunately on the rise around the state, and we certainly have not been exempt from that. We have seen a new facility open at Newtown, but it is not a regular facility that can be used. I ask that that be staffed with the staff who came out of the two previous beat areas so that can serve the community better. I was pleased to see another bipartisan commitment occur, with the police station at Highfields now open and operational. I wish them all the best in driving crime down in that northern part of my electorate. I would love to see some additional Neighbourhood Watch funding. My community has grown very interested in Neighbourhood Watch at the moment because they feel they cannot get the service they are looking for.

The Olympics offers us a great opportunity. The original bid for the Olympics was to bring back infrastructure that would otherwise be built and to accelerate its construction. One of the key components was to try to reduce the travel time around the south-east corner so that we can unlock land and opportunities. In Toowoomba we have jobs and we have opportunities, but it is very difficult because people, for some reason, just do not want to travel west. I firmly believe that if we had a good corridor connecting us to the CBD of Brisbane we would see people arrive in Toowoomba and take those good-paying jobs. Our community would grow and Queensland would be all the richer for it.

It is well and truly time. The original railway line is over 150 years old. It was opened by my predecessor John Watts—no relation. It now takes just a fraction longer to get to Brisbane than it did 150 years ago on a steam train, so it would be really nice to see that opened up.

There is also another opportunity. In Toowoomba, we have almost no female facilities around our sporting fields. The opportunity exists for the Olympics and to grow female sport. For example, one of my AFL teams with 26 players has one pedestal in the changing room. It takes the girls 30 or 40 minutes before a game to get ready to get on the field. It would be really nice to see some dedicated funding to improve the facilities that are available for females participating in sport.

It would also be nice to see mountain bike track upgrades on the range. We have some great opportunities for mountain biking. Toowoomba and the Lockyer have a good proposal which really should be funded because not only is it a great opportunity for people to get fit and healthy; it is also an Olympic sport. We also have a world champion who lives just around the corner. It would be fantastic to see that really grow.

I sincerely thank so many charities and so many people that do so many good things in my electorate. In particular, I would like to pick out Protea Place, Base Services, the Toowoomba Hospice and the Toowoomba Hospital Foundation. These are all services that make up the fabric of our community. They do a fantastic job. There are far too many to mention, but Toowoomba is a very philanthropic community who really support the various charities. I thank the charities for the hard work they do in making our community just that little bit friendlier and just that little bit nicer for those who are down on their luck or in difficult times.

I would like to finish off with a couple of things that concern me about where this House is headed. Last sitting it was celebrated that we had got rid of the upper house. I certainly do not disagree that an appointed house is inappropriate in a modern world, but it unfortunately means that this House is basically a democracy for one day every four years and then, following that, it is a dictatorship where the government get their own way on everything; they have no need to negotiate or have a conversation. That means that the people of Queensland are not served as well as they should be. Any government that becomes arrogant, disconnected and supposedly all-knowing I think is doing a disservice to the people of Queensland.

We know that the Electoral Act was altered before the last election. We know that many of those alterations slipped in little things that just tilt the playing field a little bit more towards one side of this House. That is not serving the people of Queensland. I do not endorse any government that has followed that path, and I certainly do not endorse this government following down that path. We know that the unions have the purse strings. We know that the unions control this government but the people of Queensland should control this government and the executive. I wish this government would listen to some of that.