



Speech By
Trevor Watts


MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (9.44 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the budget. First of all, budgets are about a government setting its priorities and making choices with taxpayers' money as to where it should be spent and what it should support. We need to understand that the fiscal balance is still negative \$2.4 billion and that net borrowings of \$4 billion will come out of this budget. The \$10 billion revenue windfall has been met with a \$7 billion increase in expenses. The government was delivered a spectacular \$5 billion boom in coal royalties and a further \$1 billion from petroleum royalties of, obviously, gas. We need to look at those industries and what has happened to them. As they slip down the Fraser Institute ranking, these big international companies may not find Queensland as attractive in the future as they have in the past. That would be a real shame for these industries in our area.

Government debt has increased. That means that we will pay more interest. The interest is forecast to get to \$2.9 billion per annum—and that is before some of the rises come. To put that into context, the hospital at Toowoomba this year will get \$20 million out of a \$1.3 billion fund. At the same time, the interest bill we will pay on the debt that we have would have funded the entire hospital this year. In the future, we would be able to build two hospitals from the debt we will repay.

Whilst it is a very small start, it is still a start. It is good that the government made the choice to build the hospital. The people of Toowoomba desperately need it. It will add much needed new beds. I am disappointed at the amount of funding there this year, because that means it will take longer to get the project completed. Some 1.5 per cent of this amount is not much of the funding required for the hospital.

Let me move on. Let us talk about education and the different issues that have been affected in my electorate. First and foremost, I very much thank the minister for recognising dyslexia and for providing funds for dyslexia. Not everybody may know, but I am a dyslectic reading from a very badly laid out mind map at the moment because reading text is difficult for me. To have that support for young children in school is incredibly valuable and is something that should be recognised and supported.

The funding for West Special School and for the Highfields administration block is included to complete those two projects. That is a good thing. There are a couple of things I would love to see. There are some buckets of money available. I will be working with my communities to tap into those buckets of money. With the traffic around Stuart Street at the Mount Lofty campus of Toowoomba State High School, there now is definitely a very busy junction, with buses, children crossing and lots of commuter traffic. At the moment, students literally run across the road when there is a small gap in the

traffic. Out the front of Wilsonton State High School it is getting more and more chaotic, even though that school has done a really good job and is growing. At the junction of Richmond Drive and North Street we really need to fund a scramble crossing.

One disappointment for me is that one of my hardest working schools, Toowoomba North State School—it has a lot of Yazidis as new Australians and a lot of First Nations students—has nowhere for students to play inside in the middle of winter. They have to move everything out of their library so they can have a parade. I would really like to see funding for the hall approved for Toowoomba North State School. They have a covered area, but in Toowoomba when the westerly wind blows and it is four degrees it is really not a lot of fun. I do not think it will cost a fortune. The school definitely deserves it. The students definitely deserve to be treated at the same level as those in other schools in our state. There are not many schools, except maybe in the Deputy Speaker's electorate, that get as cold as Toowoomba North in the middle of winter.

Another missed opportunity for me as we see the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and the pressures that people are feeling around that is the investment in crime prevention. In my electorate people's insurances are going up. They are having to invest money in CCTV. They are having to invest money in security screens. Our aged population are afraid when in their own homes. I have seen vision of people fighting pitched battles at their front doors in an attempt to try to defend their property and stop people from forcing them to hand over their keys. This is completely unacceptable. To hear that this year's increase in police numbers is five—not for Toowoomba but for Queensland—is very disappointing. We need both legislation and resources for the police to get on top of this crime wave and reduce the cost-of-living pressure on people due to them having to invest in their own homes to protect their property and to feel safe.

I will talk a little about social housing. There is funding of \$379,000, I think, to repair all of the social housing issues in my electorate. I am not an expert—and I would be interested in getting a briefing on this—but that seems a very small amount for the maintenance and repair of our social housing. We do have quite a number of homeless people in Toowoomba. One of the problems in Toowoomba is that, unlike some parts of the state, it is cold. In the middle of winter it is really cold.

The council has some responsibility around land supply and the lack thereof, but in the social housing space I certainly think the government could be investing more and supporting more. There are services in Toowoomba that do a good job. We have a good hub. The community work hard with both the charitable and government sectors, but long-term investment in social housing is something that I would like to see prioritised in my community. We are the hub for further western communities. People come to Toowoomba to get services and if they cannot find accommodation they can find themselves homeless pretty quickly. That then causes further problems.

Another thing I would like to talk about is water. Toowoomba needs a long-term water plan. At the moment hundreds of millions of dollars have been put on the table to run a pipeline south of us into the electorate of Deputy Speaker Lister, but we are concerned about the funding and the processing of that water. We are concerned about what that might do to Toowoomba, who will pay for the ongoing upkeep and whether we will be transporting water that has been cleaned. The finer detail of that proposal is going to be very important.

Some \$300 million is an awful lot of money. We should be looking at a longer term vision and what we are going to do on the Darling Downs over the next 20, 30, 40 years. We cannot keep putting more and more straws into Wivenhoe and expect that we are going to be able to supply water in the long term. We will need alternative sources. We should take a comprehensive look at that so we can make favourable decisions.

There are a couple of other missed opportunities in the budget. I see the roads minister in the chamber. I would like him to consider working with the council to gazette a second road to Highfields. The New England Highway becomes incredibly congested in the morning. We are seeing lower speed limits along that highway. It is causing problems in and out of various schools. It is time to at least investigate a potential corridor and protect that corridor from further development. Good planning will make an enormous difference to the community going forward.

I would propose using Old Goombungee Road and Boundary Street. There is already a bridge built over the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing—the Toowoomba Bypass—at Boundary Street. If the road were to simply go across Gowrie Creek and the railway line and connect with Old Goombungee Road that would take people into the back of Highfields and Meringandan—one of the fastest growing areas in our region—and provide access to the west, to the city and to the industrial bases at Charlton and Wilsonton where a lot of people are employed. As well, it would obviously give people who live in the Wilsonton area the ability to head north on a second road without having to go all the way into town. I think we should be looking at that road.

Outside of my electorate, the route travels south. With a little bit of Euston Road it would take people into the back of Westbrook, which is another area that will grow in the future. There will be more land released both at Highfields and Westbrook. These will be growing suburbs in our community going forward. Rather than wait until these areas have grown and the infrastructure is choking, let us gazette the road and protect the corridor and when the triggers are there and there is the budget we can work with the council to get the road built. The most important thing is to protect that second road corridor so that we have a long-term plan for the people of Highfields.

I will go back to our hospital and the \$20 million in funding. There has been a lot of spruiking about the biggest ever health budget. In the same way that the funding for this budget is intergenerational, when the government goes into debt it means that future taxpayers will have to pay that debt off. There is no magic tree. Taxpayers sometime in the future will pay this off. That means our children will be burdened with our debt.

I would suggest that in the future the cost of hospital construction is not going to go down. It seems imminently sensible to me to inject more money sooner and get the hospital underway faster so that we not only get the beds sooner but also save money in the long term. It is strange to me that in the health budget we can only find \$20 million for Toowoomba Hospital, \$20 million for Bundaberg Hospital and \$20 million for Coomera Hospital, but we found \$200 million to lease Wellcamp for a year.

It seems to me that one of the reasons the government has intergenerational debt is because of waste. When governments waste money and carry debt into the future then future generations have to pay for that waste. I do not think that is fair on future generations.

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr WATTS: Whilst I appreciate that the shadow minister and the minister are arguing, I am talking about something very serious—that is, the money that my children will have to pay back because of the incompetence and waste of this Labor government. We do not honestly know how much has been invested in Wellcamp. It is a secret. It is not transparent. That is not the way the government should operate.

There are a couple of other things that I will mention quickly before my time runs out. Withdrawing money from the safe night out precincts is a major mistake. This will put pressure on our hardworking police who will now have to resource this out of their regular budget. These are late-night shifts. It will be very difficult for them to do that. This is an industry that I used to work in as a former publican. It has been a great program that both sides of parliament have supported. If someone loses their life because we did have police on the beat because the budget was tightened up in that area it would be a tragedy. I would like the government to reconsider that.

There is some money for alcohol and drug services. We could definitely do with a detox facility in Toowoomba. We have both Teen Challenge and Sunrise Way running very successful programs. A detox facility would be fantastic and is very much needed.

At the end of the day, we are borrowing more than we should. We are wasting money. Future generations will have to pay this back.