




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.09 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the 2023 budget bills. In some ways this budget gives us a glimpse of what we could achieve if we took on corporate interests and their massive profits more substantially. By raising the royalties on super profitable coal prices, we gained almost \$15.3 billion in coal royalties last year. That is \$8 billion more than expected. However, Labor's royalties plan is not sustainable. If it is not willing to take on the big banks, gas companies and developers to diversify state revenue, Queenslanders will continue to miss out on billions of dollars for schools and hospitals and housing over the next decade.

The Greens have been calling for higher royalties for years now. Members will recall that in 2020 we were the only ones who went to the election calling for more for Queenslanders and less for mining billionaires. After a 10-year freeze on coal royalties, last year the Labor Party finally caved under a wave of Greens electoral success. Believe me when I say that no-one is happier to see Labor finally stand up to the coal lobby than the Greens, but its higher royalties only apply to coal that is sold at super profit levels, capturing just a fifth of the value of record coal exports. Those exports tripled to \$83½ billion in the last year, but those record high prices are forecast to end in the next few years. Meanwhile, royalties on gas companies—which are, mind you, 96 per cent foreign owned and which doubled their exports in 2022—remain unchanged. In fact, instead of properly taxing gas companies, the government is giving them a \$21 million handout in this budget.

It should be self-evident that we cannot ride the wave of coal royalties forever, especially if we want a government that pretends it cares about climate change. The Greens have proposed to increase to 35 per cent the base rate for royalties on coal and an increase to gas royalties as our exports of both of these scale down over the next decade. Listening to this debate just confirms that the Greens are the only party that has a long-term plan to diversify state revenue. The profits of the big four banks are also up 19 per cent off the back of rate rises. That equates to billions of dollars out of the pockets of renters and mortgagors and into the hands of the biggest banks and big business. Queenslanders deserve a fair share of those profits too which is why the Greens have proposed a very modest 0.05 per cent levy on the revenue of the predatory big banks.

Unlike the major parties, we are also not afraid to take on the private property and development industry. We should be taxing developers' windfall profits with an up-zoning levy and freeing up more housing with a tax on private property investors who intentionally leave homes empty. This budget and this government have put developers first and renters last. This budget has just \$176 million more for housing this year than last. This government is bragging about 500 extra social homes in this budget while there are 47,000 people in the critical-need category on the social housing waiting list and 300,000 Queenslanders experiencing housing stress. At the Labor government's current rate, it will take more than four decades to house every person on the social housing waiting list, and that is assuming that in the middle of a housing crisis the list is not going to grow any further than it is at the moment.

Labor stands here with a straight face and tells us that we should be grateful for its tax concessions to private property developers that might deliver some new so-called affordable rentals in seven years time—not genuinely affordable housing though. We are talking about apartments 25 per cent below market rents—still insultingly out of reach for most working people because Labor refuses to regulate rent increases meaningfully. In 20 years time those affordable rentals will revert back to market rent. It is money in the pockets of rich developers and crumbs for Queensland renters. It is little wonder that there were hundreds of people outside parliament on Wednesday demanding better. We need a rent freeze now to help renters catch up with inflation. We need a real cap on rent increases and a vacancy levy to open up empty homes across the state and direct investment in tens of thousands of new social housing homes. Instead, we are seeing Labor give handouts to developers.

Again the government wants a pat on the back for its 500 extra homes in the budget, but we all know that a key part of its housing strategy is prisons—prisons for kids as young as 10 years old. We still do not know how much its two new youth prisons will cost, but it could very easily exceed half a billion dollars. There is almost \$10 million in the budget this year just for the preliminary work. We are also bleeding almost \$52 million on dealing with overcrowded adult prisons because all this government knows how to do is lock people up. Despite claiming it is investing in therapeutic responses to youth offending, addressing the causes rather than just the consequences, the numbers reveal otherwise. The vast majority of this government's youth justice package is for more police and prisons, just like the LNP wants. It might as well have its policy written by the Queensland Police Union or the *Courier-Mail*.

A few short years ago the youth justice minister was unflinching in accepting that building more youth prisons was a failure of policy and leadership, and now that appears to be the sum total of its policy on youth justice. While police get more and more money and power, community-run services—those services that we know work—are drastically underfunded. If we continue down this path that the government has been taking, we will never be able to build enough prisons to catch up.

I know many people will be relieved to hear about the energy bill rebates in this budget. That one-off short-term relief is absolutely welcome, but it is not a long-term plan. We could permanently cut energy bills by bringing our whole energy system into public hands, cutting the marketing costs and the bonuses for those private energy company CEOs. We know that the government took more than a few leaves out of the Greens book last year when it released its Energy and Jobs Plan, and this budget proves without question that we can use higher mining royalties to build more renewable energy. That is great. It is fantastic.

Government members interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: Everyone is chiming in to agree with me here. This is what we have been calling for for years now—and I am happy to give credit where it is due—but it is still backing new coal and gas, its emissions reduction targets are still on a par with those of the former Morrison government and it still plans to allow half of our energy system to be privately owned. The government's climate credentials really fall apart when it comes to gas. CleanCo, our publicly owned renewable energy company, will spend almost \$30 million on its Kogan North gas project this year. That is CleanCo—\$30 million, one year, gas project. Clean gas, hey? There is \$21 million in the budget in handouts for private gas companies to expand their operations in the Bowen and Galilee basins. Yet again this government is cosying up to the very people—the very companies—that are making the climate crisis worse.

The budget also shows that the government has lowered its ambition significantly when it comes to public transport usage. Although fare revenue is expected to recover to about the historical pre COVID average this year, it is now forecasting fare revenue in 2024-25 to be just \$358 million compared to the projection last year which was \$414 million. That is a substantial drop in expected patronage. Even with fare revenue recovering slightly, this still only covers about 17 per cent of the total cost of delivering public transport in South-East Queensland.

There are various reasons why more people do not use public transport in Queensland, but it is absolutely unequivocal that cost is one of those reasons. For a fraction of its current budget, the government could cover 100 per cent of the cost of public transport—not the 80 per cent or 90 per cent subsidies we have seen in recent years but 100 per cent coverage of the cost and make it free. Free, frequent and accessible public transport would be a far better investment than the continued multimillion dollar spending on wasteful road widening and duplication projects. In that frame, obviously frequency and reliability are really important but the quality of our infrastructure and our services are also important to public transport users, so it is frustrating that the government still has not committed to funding to upgrade the Taringa train station in my electorate to make it compliant with federal disability standards. It frankly beggars belief that this busy station right near a hospital, shops and community facilities is still only accessible by stairs, and this is one of the best used train stations in the network.

We also need funding to create better connected buses in the inner west and to begin planning work on an inner-west transitway, including a cross-campus bus link at UQ and bus lanes on Sir Fred Schonell Drive. I have my eyes on the Centenary Motorway planning study that is due to finish this year. If community feedback, including my own submission, is genuinely taken into account, that study should recommend a western busway, including dedicated bus lanes along the motorway or otherwise alongside the \$270 million duplication of the Centenary Bridge, or we will be stuck with just another road-widening project that does nothing for public transport and ultimately makes traffic congestion worse.

I recently finished a community survey of locals' experiences at the notorious Bardon roundabout, and the transport minister can expect to hear from me soon with some of their stories. I do not think the minister will be surprised to hear their account of how dangerous this roundabout is and that the government really should have allocated funding in this budget for upgrades and a speed limit reduction on Metroad 5. I will address the minister directly on those issues.

I am really glad to see the state government has put another \$160,000 into the planning process for the Witton Road bikeway, which will hopefully, one day soon, link the Centenary Bikeway to the new Indooroopilly Riverwalk, replacing a dangerous gauntlet along Witton Road and what can only be described as a hair-raising intersection at Kate Street, Indooroopilly. I was more than happy to support council's application for that further state funding, alongside the Brisbane West Bicycle User Group. Both of us put in letters of support for that project. We are up to a total of \$300,000 of state funding for that project now, even though council are shaping up to take four years to do just this design work, finishing in 2024 rather than 2022. It will be two years overdue at best. It is more than a little bit ridiculous to hear the local LNP councillor has been feigning disappointment about not getting state construction funding for the Witton Road bikeway when they are two years late on finishing the design.

I am even more disappointed that council has not got its act together to even apply for state funding to complete the other huge missing link on the same corridor—that is, protected bike lanes on Lambert Road linking the Indooroopilly Riverwalk to the UQ Esplanade. This is all the more urgent with news just weeks ago that a student at Indooroopilly State High School was doored—someone opened their door on him while he was riding home on Lambert Road. It has been on the priority route map since at least 2017, but after 20 years of an LNP council they have not even produced a concept design.

We know now that our local push for this upgrade is working because the LNP councillor recently held a round table to think about when they might start planning to possibly build the first part of this link, but at this rate every kid at Indooroopilly State High School at the moment, and St Peters probably, would have almost graduated by the time anything happens. My youngest will graduate from Indro High in 2036. Fingers crossed we can see something done before then.

Frankly, the whole model where council waits on state funding once a year to do even the smallest bit of work on fixing up the cycling infrastructure has to change. The LNP council are happy enough to widen roads without any state funding and the state similarly will commit serious funding to road projects almost sight unseen. We need a more efficient process for cycling infrastructure.

There is money in this budget for much needed new buildings and refurbishment at Indooroopilly State School, which I absolutely welcome. Around a further \$1 million is allocated for maintenance and minor works across other schools in my electorate, which I am pleased to see. I am still really concerned that we do not have any commitment for new infrastructure at Indooroopilly State High School. The government seems to be relying solely on enrolment management to fix overcrowding rather than stumping up the cash that is desperately needed for new buildings and facilities at a well-loved and outstanding local high school that so many people want to send their kids to.

It is really disappointing that the process for delivering a new primary school in Brisbane's inner west has stalled and that the previous budget allocation has simply been removed in this year's budget, as far as I can tell. The government has promised it is still committed to delivering the school and if they are planning on breaking that promise they will absolutely need to explain it to the families across my electorate with kids in overcrowded classrooms, with limited play time and reduced facilities at their school. The budget does include something of a stop gap: \$19 million for upgrades at inner west primary schools. It is a pretty substantial sum, starting with \$4 million this year. It is a good sign that we have some big funding going into the westside, but I still have a lot of questions that I will refer to the minister. The department really needs to get on with identifying a new site for the school, ideally in Taringa where the three under-pressure catchments converge, and allocate funding from the increased land acquisition budget towards it—that is that increased \$174 million for school land acquisition which is up from \$65 million last year which I welcome.

To conclude, this budget is a case of what could happen if we started properly taxing corporations' super profits. Queenslanders still are not getting their fair share. We can make sure our health and education systems are fully funded, get out of coal and gas and make a fair transition plan for resources communities and house every Queenslanders. To do this we need to take on the big banks, property developers and gas lobby together. While Labor gives handouts to property developers and the gas industry, the Greens are fighting for a real increase to mining and gas royalties, a big bank levy, a windfall tax on developer profits and a levy to stop investors leaving homes empty.