




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2023

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.36 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate. A budget sets out a government's priorities. Therefore, with the chaos and crisis that we have seen booming in health, one would hope that we would see some priority for that. With the youth crime crisis in my community and more broadly across the whole of Queensland, one would hope to see a priority for that. With a cost-of-living crisis, again, one would hope that the government would act. We hear their words—

**Ms Boyd:** Have you read the papers?

**Mr WATTS:**—and we hear that they are acting.

**Ms Boyd** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask that she turns her microphone on so that the people of Queensland can hear her nonsensical interjections and so that we can make sure that they are recorded by Hansard.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Lui): Member for Pine Rivers, order!

**Mr WATTS:** The member for Pine Rivers.

**Mr BAILEY:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member for Toowoomba North is addressing people directly across the chamber, which is against the standing orders.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, I ask you to direct all comments through the chair. I remind members to let the member speak.

**Mr WATTS:** Let us look at the cost of living, which we hear a lot about. At the same time as we hear about the cost of living we also hear about an increase in debt to \$140-plus billion. The question is: when a government incurs debt, whose debt is it and who pays for it in the future? Of course, this intergenerational debt will be paid for by the sons and daughters of Queenslanders. By increasing the debt to \$140 billion it would seem that we are not actually addressing the cost of living in the long term.

In addition, in one quarter we have seen a 32 per cent increase in the cost of electricity. Some of the hardworking members of my community, particularly in Toowoomba, are fundamentally dependent on that electricity to be cheap and available through winter so that they can keep warm. I am concerned that the cost of living has not been addressed as widely it should be. I am also concerned about the debt going forward.

Let me come to the crime crisis because I have repeatedly asked in this chamber for the number of police rostered on in Toowoomba. We find that either the department or the Police Service are hiding the numbers by saying it is too much work to get those numbers. Since the last election, we know that the numbers across the state have dropped by 72. What the people of Queensland and the people of Toowoomba want is the truth not about approved positions but about what boots are actually available

on the ground. I asked a very simple question: during January how many general duties police were available to be rostered on? I was told that that is too complicated to get. I explained the other night in the chamber that someone who misleads this House can face serious charges. I am told by people in the Police Service that it is not too difficult to get that information.

I again ask the minister to be aware that I will be pursuing those numbers. The people of the Toowoomba community deserve to know how many officers are available for rostering so that it can be clear that the youth crime crisis and the chaos caused by this government changing the legislation—and having this generation grow up with no consequence for their actions—has repercussions in terms of Police Service resourcing. That is the crime crisis.

When it comes to the health crisis, we hear an awful lot about spending on hospitals. I welcome the \$50 million that has been allocated in this budget to the Toowoomba Hospital. I welcome the fact that we now have a tender. Everybody in Toowoomba knows that originally we were looking to get a \$2 billion tertiary hospital with increased levels of service, because we are the service centre for South-West Queensland. We did not get that. We will be split across two campuses. We have \$1.3 billion, of which 95 per cent is allocated beyond the forwards of this budget. That is actually off in the never-never. It will be funded at some future point by some future government—certainly beyond the next election.

Whilst I appreciate the \$50 million will mean that some earthworks will be done and that we have a tender, it is not enough to solve the health crisis and it is not enough to service my community in the coming decades—not by any stretch. The government should be allocating resources for a hospital not to service today's needs but to make sure that, when we build a hospital, for the lifetime of that hospital it will be able to service the needs not just of my community but of the wider south-west region. It should be a university hospital, a tertiary-level hospital, with a serious level of services so that we do not have to helivac people to Brisbane all the time and they can be treated locally by the very competent staff we have in Toowoomba. I thank all the staff for the work that they do, but they deserve a built environment that allows them to deliver the services the people of Queensland, Toowoomba and Darling Downs demand. We do see an increase in some doctors, though, and that is a good thing. The Premier's office has increased—I think it is 98 more spin doctors. Obviously that means they can get the message out that the hospital has not been funded adequately until beyond the forwards.

To be fair, there is some good news. I have been working for some time with the community at Toowoomba North State School. The P&C, the teachers, the students and the staff should be thanked for coming together as a community to push to try to get a sports hall enclosed, which is what we were looking for. To the education minister's credit, she has gone beyond that and will now build them a new sports hall. This is a very deserving community. I am sure they all would like to make sure that I thank the minister for spending that money in the community. Unfortunately, in this budget only \$300,000 has been allocated, but that is a really good start. That will build them a substantial facility when they get the full \$8-plus million for the hall. I thank the minister for that.

There is also some money for car parking at Fairview Heights State School which the P&C, the staff and the community have been lobbying for with me as their strong local voice. I appreciate the minister listening and providing some money to bitumen some more car parking there. There are a couple of other schools for which we still need to do some work, particularly around safety. One is the Stuart Street junction just near Toowoomba State High School at Mount Lofty. It is a safety issue on a foggy morning travelling down the hill to the staggered junction. We have had several accidents. I would like to think we can invest in that road and make it a much safer junction prior to a real tragedy happening. At the moment, it has been only financial expenses and temporary visits to the hospital to get services, but that is something that I think should be done. Out the front of Wilsonton State High School there has been a call for a scramble crossing because so many kids cross the road and they end up piled up on one corner of Richmond Drive and North Street and they fall off the kerbs. If we can turn that junction into a scramble crossing, it will be so much safer for them. I would like to see whether that falls into the funding allocated for making school areas safer in terms of roads.

Those at Rockville State School have simply asked for their crossing to be highlighted as a pedestrian crossing so it can be used out of school hours for as well by people coming backwards and forwards to the school. There are a couple of opportunities for us that did not come up in this budget, but hopefully we can work on as the year goes on.

In terms of roads in my electorate, something the community has been calling for for some time—and we have done activity around it—is a roundabout at Kratzke, O'Brien and Highfields roads. There is money in this budget for that. It is not clear whether it is for next year, the year after or the year after that, but hopefully before 2027 we will finally get a roundabout there to help that junction work smoother.

The real opportunity for Toowoomba is the north-south corridor connection—building a new New England Highway effectively—to take pressure off the existing New England Highway as traffic tries to get to town. Sometimes it takes five or six attempts to get through a set of traffic lights at peak times. It is inefficient for the city and is certainly inefficient for transport that is trying to use the New England to get north and south around Toowoomba. To its credit, the department has been working on a plan. We need to make sure this plan has much wider consultation, because there are certainly some issues around the environment and koala habitat in the north. There are definitely some issues around future development restrictions in the south on land that at some point in the future may well be very developable as Toowoomba grows. I would hate to see a dual carriageway put straight through that land when we have a corridor a little further west which is a part of the Gore Highway and bypass that could be used. I think there are some sensible solutions available there. I encourage the department to work harder with the community to explore those solutions and to explain, if they are not going to work, why. Let us as a community understand so that we can all move together and get on with getting this road connected, because it will definitely help the city grow and make it more productive, more efficient and more livable for people trying to get around.

Recently, we had an outbreak of fire ants in Kleinton at Highfields. That is of great concern. I did see that there was a cut in the biosecurity budget, which was also concerning. I know that the issue of fire ants is outside of that budget, but we must be ever vigilant on biosecurity. Fire ants are a potential absolute disaster for both horticulture and agriculture. If they get to Toowoomba and establish a foothold, I point out that we are a logistics hub for pretty much the whole of the east coast. Obviously, we are all dependent on income and jobs opportunities from agriculture and horticulture. I urge the government to throw everything it has at this to make sure that fire ants do not gain a foothold in my community. I ask the community to be vigilant and to go to the various websites—my website, the department's website and the minister's website—to understand what we are looking at and make sure we have an awareness about it.

I am concerned about the Olympic legacy for Toowoomba. It seems that we might get a couple of rounds of soccer matches, but we do not have an athletics track for 165,000 people in Toowoomba and the wider Darling Downs area. We do not even have a throw circle, yet the best throwers have come out of Toowoomba for both the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics. We do not have a circle that even has a proper netting around it and a flat surface. I think we can do much better with our Olympic legacy.

We also do not have enough female change room facilities. If we really want to get serious about making sure females are participating in sport, we need to upgrade those facilities. If ever there were an Olympic legacy I was looking for, it would be an athletics track, female change room facilities and other athletics such as throws being able to be accommodated in our area.

When it comes to social housing, I was concerned because not only on a statewide basis do we see a reduction in the number of new builds but also in Toowoomba we see a million dollars cut out of the budget in new builds. I acknowledge that not everything is necessarily a new build but, if we want to increase capacity in the rental market, we have to build new homes. Cutting the budget by a million dollars is not going to achieve that. That was disappointing to see. It just goes to show the failure of the government to deliver in my community on these things. To see the housing budget cut at a time when costs are increasing in that area means that we will not be able to deal with the housing crisis caused by this government that my community is experiencing.

There is another opportunity that I would like to talk about briefly. Several of the environmental groups have asked me to start pushing for Redwood Park to be recognised as a national park. I think that is something we should consider as part of the protected area estate. I think the escarpment not just at Redwood but generally gives good prospects for that. It is land that is hard to develop. It is land that provides good habitat for many of our native species. I think it is land that we should protect, whilst allowing ecotourism and other kinds of eco activities to go on in those areas, so I encourage the minister to look at that.

I want to mention payroll tax briefly. Toowoomba is not getting the regional exemption. In Toowoomba we never quite know whether we are in the south-east corner or outside the south-east corner. What we find is that when the government is spending money we are outside the south-east corner and when the government is trying to raise money we are included in the south-east corner. We are two-time losers when it comes to the government's treatment of Toowoomba. Either we are in the south-east corner or we are not. To be honest, it does not really matter which one you pick. It matters that you are consistent, so the payroll tax exemption should be looked at. Chaos and crisis and a failure to deliver are hallmarks of this government.

*(Time expired)*