




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2024

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; STATE FINANCIAL
INSTRUCTIONS AND METWAY MERGER AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (4.25 pm): Before I start my contribution, it has been brought to my attention that a post I made on social media on 18 April could have misrepresented proceedings of the House. This was not my intention. I have removed the post and I apologise to the House.

I rise to speak in support of the cognate appropriation bills and this budget. I start by thanking the new Premier and Treasurer for their support of Queenslanders in this budget that goes to the very core of cost-of-living relief and is looking after those in our community who are doing it tough. It is in stark contrast to the feeble budget reply we saw from the Leader of the Opposition, which was all slogans and no substance. It was akin to a snake-oil salesman's pitch. It was a copy of the government's plans. He was the purveyor of false hope. There is a saying in North Queensland—and it was demonstrated in 2015 when the then member for Mundingburra and now Leader of the Opposition was turfed out after one term—and that is that the mob will work you out.

Mr Stevens: They've already worked you out!

Mr HARPER: I have been here 10 years, champion! This budget goes directly to the heart of cost-of-living pressures, providing relief in electricity, rego, transport, kids' sport with the FairPlay vouchers, and stamp duty. We have house and land packages in Thuringowa for \$460,000. That will save those people who want to move into our area thousands of dollars in stamp duty and that is certainly an incentive to get into a home.

This budget is for hardworking families in my electorate of Thuringowa—the battlers—who have provided feedback directly to me on their thoughts, in particular on the electricity cost-of-living rebate of \$1,300, which will help with the cost-of-living pressures that everyone in our communities is feeling, whether that is on the supermarket shelves or at the petrol pump. I want to talk about Taylor, who I had a conversation with a week ago. She is a single mum with a few kids who lives just over Riverway Drive—I had to get that in there! She was nearly in tears. She said, 'This is the best news I have heard in a long time.' We hear whingeing and whining from those opposite that this budget does nothing. This goes to the very core of what we do best as a Labor government—that is, look after Queenslanders. When I have spoken to seniors and let them know that they will get an additional \$372 on top of the \$1,300 cost-of-living rebate, some have told me that they will not pay an Ergon bill until well into 2025.

I acknowledge that this budget delivers for our key areas of health, education, community safety and roads. Of course, I will start with the biggest road project in Thuringowa. No, it is not the recently opened \$280 million Townsville Ring Road stage 5. Of course, I am talking about the Riverway Drive stage 2 duplication. Some \$95 million has been allocated to this duplication. Recently, I was out doorknocking the length and breadth of this major road network providing an update on the main water

pipeline which we had to replace so construction can start on the road duplication. We are just weeks away from announcing the successful tenderer. Construction will start soon as they are doing their testing and commissioning of the new pipeline.

Whilst I am on the subject, I have started an MP petition to encourage Townsville City Council to accept the additional \$8 million to open Shetland and Beck Drive to provide an alternative route connecting residents to the new on ramps of the ring road. To date, hundreds have signed the petition and are very happy with the progress and update of Riverway Drive.

Whilst I am talking about roads, in the budget I see a further \$43 million is allocated to road improvements from Halliday Street in Kirwan to Gouldian Avenue. One of the huge budget allocations is the \$145 million for the Kirwan police precinct and the new police academy which, of course, was completely unmatched by the LNP. We know their record under the likes of the Leader of the Opposition when they sacked police in our community and went to sell the old academy. We are backing police in Thuringowa with this new academy. I thank the police minister who is in the chamber. Just recently, he attended the site with the officer in charge of the Kirwan Police Station, Matt Lyons, to do the sod turn. Thank you, Minister. We are backing our police and not going back 40 years ago and turning it into a trotting track as the LNP candidate has stated publicly on the record we should do. We are moving forward. We are backing our police.

When I was elected in 2015, Kirwan station had a staff establishment of 54. After the last cohort graduated and the 21 graduates go to Kirwan station it will take the station to 90 officers. They get their new academy as well.

Mr Saunders interjected.

Mr HARPER: Thank you, mate. When I started, the Rapid Action Patrol hub had 20 officers thanks to the LNP who half staffed it. We turned that around to where it now has over 40 staff. The number of officers at the new police station in the Upper Ross went from two to 10. From 2015 to 2024—and I know I have annoyed the police minister but I want to thank him for this—we have delivered more than 66 new officers, the helicopter and additional resources to the Thuringowa electorate, making our community safer.

I have so much more to talk about but, in the interests of time, I will end like this: I believe this is a budget for the future and one that delivers the largest cost-of-living relief for my hardworking mums and dads in Thuringowa. The Deputy Speaker has reviewed and approved the rest of my speech on the budget for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*. I commend the budget to the House.

The speech read as follows—

Speaker, I note in this budget an increase in operational funding for the Police Helicopter in Townsville and we all know that aerial asset along with more police and funding for more operational funding is absolutely helping deliver on community safety.

Speaker, I am also happy to see more funding for the Townsville Street University and a further \$4.5M to expand the high risk courts and fast tracking of sentencing in Townsville.

Speaker, coming from a health background, I am proud to see the huge investment in this budget for the Townsville Hospital and Health Service of \$1.5B.

This is a significant increase as we deliver on our big build with the \$538M new building for an additional 143 beds.

In my electorate, we will see the completion of the \$45M Kirwan Health Precinct new build is ongoing and I look forward to seeing that completed for our dedicated health workers in my area of Thuringowa.

Speaker, I am proud to have advocated for more funding for my local schools and I know through the excellent working relationship I have with my principals and P&C's that they will be excited at more funding for Kelso, Rasmussen, Weir, Willows, Heatley High and Primary, Kirwan State and High School.

They will receive more funding for block upgrades, new Tuckshops, Playground upgrades, and I know how much they value these investments in local schools in Thuringowa.

Finally, when it comes to delivering for North Queensland, we are funding the largest Nation Building Electricity Grid, Copperstring, which will unlock Billions in critical minerals and deliver thousands of jobs, in North Qld receives even more funding in this budget, unmatched by the LNP.

Speaker, we are doing a sod turn in July in Stage 1 Copperstring in Hughenden, and I see further funding in this budget I see more funding for Power Upgrades at Ross Sub Station, and an additional \$4.5M for a large 8MW Battery for Rasmussen to help store the power generated from rooftop solar in my electorate of Thuringowa.